Tanach in Two:

Sefer Shoftim – the Book of Judges

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**I Historical Context**

1. The Sefer takes place over about 300 years, beginning with the last years of Yehoshua’s leadership, and concluding with Shimshon
   1. Written by Shmuel Hanavi
   2. The following Sefer, Shmuel, will cover the last 50 or so years leading up to the appointment of first King, Shaul. The entire *Sefer Shoftim* is in fact marked by the phrase: כי אין מלך בישראל – and there was no King in Israel
2. A Difficult Book
   1. Events and behaviours, both individually and nationally, hard to understand
3. A Shofet – A Judge
   1. These years the Jewish people are led by a successive group of 13 Judges, called *Shoftim*, who rise to prominence, wage wars, guide and inspire the people.
      1. Some very short tenures, some very long
   2. Who were they?

שופט זה דיין שדן דין אמת לאמיתו (חגיגה יד.)

A *Shofet* (Judge) is one who judges a case to the depths of it’s truth (Chagigah 141)

* 1. Some were clearly described as greater or more pious than others (it seems almost in a constant descending progression), but all Torah scholars, and each one in his generation as its greatest (See addendum #3)
  2. What Tribes did they come from?

אין לך כל שבט ושבט מישראל שלא העמיד ממנו שופט (סוכה כז:)

There is no tribe in Israel from which a *Shofet* did not emerge (Sukkah 27b)

**II The Repetitive Pattern**

1. There is one pattern that is impossible to miss
   1. The Jewish People sin and stray from the Life of Torah (most often with idolatry)
   2. Hashem sends a foreign enemy to subjugate them
   3. The Jews cry out to Hashem
   4. Hashem elevates a *Shofet* to save them
   5. Repentance and the Land is quiet
   6. The *Shofet* dies, and the people return their evil ways
   7. Repeat (see addendum #1)
2. Shmuel had an agenda in all the repetition
   1. Important to remember the “boring” good years of quiet far outnumbered the colorful stories of difficulty
   2. The oppressor almost always changed, the root causes remained the same
   3. Lessons of failure and return

**III Some Root Causes and Influences**

1. Bad Neighbours
   1. Both Moshe and Yehoshua were explicit before their deaths regarding the influences of the idolatrous nations that occupied the Land and the need to remove them (See Addendum #2)

שופטים פרק א: (יט) וַיְהִ֤י ה' אֶת־יְהוּדָ֔ה וַיֹּ֖רֶשׁ אֶת־הָהָ֑ר **כִּ֣י לֹ֤א לְהוֹרִישׁ֙ אֶת־יֹֽשְׁבֵ֣י הָעֵ֔מֶק** כִּי־רֶ֥כֶב בַּרְזֶ֖ל לָהֶֽם: ... (כא) וְאֶת־הַיְבוּסִי֙ יֹשֵׁ֣ב יְרֽוּשָׁלִַ֔ם **לֹ֥א הוֹרִ֖ישׁוּ בְּנֵ֣י בִנְיָמִ֑ן** וַיֵּ֨שֶׁב הַיְבוּסִ֜י אֶת־בְּנֵ֤י בִנְיָמִן֙ בִּיר֣וּשָׁלִַ֔ם עַ֖ד הַיּ֥וֹם הַזֶּֽה: ... (כז) **וְלֹֽא־הוֹרִ֣ישׁ מְנַשֶּׁ֗ה** אֶת־בֵּית־שְׁאָ֣ן וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֶ֘יהָ֘ וְאֶת־תַּעְנַ֣ךְ וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֶ֒יהָ֒ וְאֶת־יֹֽשְׁבֵ֨ [יֹֽשְׁבֵ֨י] ד֜וֹר וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֶ֗יהָ וְאֶת־יֽוֹשְׁבֵ֤י יִבְלְעָם֙ וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֶ֔יהָ וְאֶת־יֽוֹשְׁבֵ֥י מְגִדּ֖וֹ וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֶ֑יהָ וַיּ֨וֹאֶל֙ הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִ֔י לָשֶׁ֖בֶת בָּאָ֥רֶץ הַזֹּֽאת: (כח) וַֽיְהִי֙ כִּֽי־חָזַ֣ק יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וַיָּ֥שֶׂם אֶת־הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִ֖י לָמַ֑ס **וְהוֹרֵ֖ישׁ לֹ֥א הֽוֹרִישֽׁוֹ**: (כט) **וְאֶפְרַ֨יִם֙ לֹ֣א הוֹרִ֔ישׁ אֶת־הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִ֖י** הַיּוֹשֵׁ֣ב בְּגָ֑זֶר וַיֵּ֧שֶׁב הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִ֛י בְּקִרְבּ֖וֹ בְּגָֽזֶר: (ל) **זְבוּל֗וּן לֹ֤א הוֹרִישׁ֙ אֶת־יֽוֹשְׁבֵ֣י קִטְר֔וֹן** וְאֶת־יֽוֹשְׁבֵ֖י נַֽהֲלֹ֑ל וַיֵּ֤שֶׁב הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִי֙ בְּקִרְבּ֔וֹ וַיִּֽהְי֖וּ לָמַֽס: (לא) **אָשֵׁ֗ר לֹ֤א הוֹרִישׁ֙ אֶת־יֹֽשְׁבֵ֣י** עַכּ֔וֹ וְאֶת־יֽוֹשְׁבֵ֖י צִיד֑וֹן וְאֶת־אַחְלָ֤ב וְאֶת־אַכְזִיב֙ וְאֶת־חֶלְבָּ֔ה וְאֶת־אֲפִ֖יק וְאֶת־רְחֹֽב: (לב) וַיֵּ֨שֶׁב֙ הָאָ֣שֵׁרִ֔י בְּקֶ֥רֶב הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִ֖י יֹֽשְׁבֵ֣י הָאָ֑רֶץ כִּ֖י לֹ֥א הֽוֹרִישֽׁוֹ: (לג) **נַפְתָּלִ֗י לֹֽא־הוֹרִ֞ישׁ אֶת־יֹֽשְׁבֵ֤י** בֵֽית־שֶׁ֨מֶשׁ֙ וְאֶת־יֹֽשְׁבֵ֣י בֵֽית־עֲנָ֔ת וַיֵּ֕שֶׁב בְּקֶ֥רֶב הַֽכְּנַֽעֲנִ֖י יֹֽשְׁבֵ֣י הָאָ֑רֶץ וְיֹֽשְׁבֵ֤י בֵֽית־שֶׁ֨מֶשׁ֙ וּבֵ֣ית עֲנָ֔ת הָי֥וּ לָהֶ֖ם לָמַֽס:

1. Lack of Leadership
   1. Moshe, before he does, requests of Hashem a successor

)טו( וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶל ה' לֵאמֹֽר: (טז) יִפְקֹ֣ד ה' אֱלֹהֵ֥י הָֽרוּחֹ֖ת לְכָל־בָּשָׂ֑ר אִ֖ישׁ עַל־הָֽעֵדָֽה: (יז) אֲשֶׁר־יֵצֵ֣א לִפְנֵיהֶ֗ם וַֽאֲשֶׁ֤ר יָבֹא֙ לִפְנֵיהֶ֔ם וַֽאֲשֶׁ֥ר יוֹֽצִיאֵ֖ם וַֽאֲשֶׁ֣ר יְבִיאֵ֑ם וְלֹ֤א תִֽהְיֶה֙ עֲדַ֣ת ה' כַּצֹּ֕אן אֲשֶׁ֥ר אֵין־לָהֶ֖ם רֹעֶֽה:

(15) Moses spoke to Hashem, saying, (16) “Let Hashem, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community (17) who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that Hashem’s community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd.”

* 1. When Yehoshua dies, we find the following

(כט) וַיְהִ֗י אַֽחֲרֵי֙ הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּה וַיָּ֛מׇת יְהוֹשֻׁ֥עַ בִּן־נ֖וּן עֶ֣בֶד ה' בֶּן־מֵאָ֥ה וָעֶ֖שֶׂר שָׁנִֽים: (ל) וַיִּקְבְּר֤וּ אֹתוֹ֙ בִּגְב֣וּל נַֽחֲלָת֔וֹ בְּתִמְנַת־סֶ֖רַח אֲשֶׁ֣ר בְּהַר־אֶפְרָ֑יִם מִצְּפ֖וֹן לְהַר־גָּֽעַשׁ: (לא) וַיַּֽעֲבֹ֤ד יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ אֶת ה' כֹּ֖ל יְמֵ֣י יְהוֹשֻׁ֑עַ וְכֹ֣ל ׀ יְמֵ֣י הַזְּקֵנִ֗ים אֲשֶׁ֨ר הֶֽאֱרִ֤יכוּ יָמִים֙ אַֽחֲרֵ֣י יְהוֹשֻׁ֔עַ וַֽאֲשֶׁ֣ר יָֽדְע֗וּ אֵ֚ת כׇּל־מַֽעֲשֵׂ֣ה ה' אֲשֶׁ֥ר עָשָׂ֖ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵֽל:

(29) It was after these events that Yehoshua, Servant of Hashem, died at the age of 110. (30) they buried him in the border of his heritage in Timnath-Serah, which is in Mount Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. (31) Israel served Hashem all the days of Yehoshua and all the days of the Elders whose days were lengthened after Yehoshua, and who had known all the deeds of Hashem, which He had done for Israel.

* 1. With a lack of centralized leadership, there is a fundamental shift, expressed in the following: The Torah demands:

(יח) וְעָשִׂ֛יתָ הַיָּשָׁ֥ר וְהַטּ֖וֹב **בְּעֵינֵ֣י ה'** לְמַ֙עַן֙ יִ֣יטַב לָ֔ךְ וּבָ֗אתָ וְיָֽרַשְׁתָּ֙ אֶת־הָאָ֣רֶץ הַטֹּבָ֔ה אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּ֥ע ה'כ לַאֲבֹתֶֽיךָ׃ (יט) לַהֲדֹ֥ף אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֶ֖יךָ מִפָּנֶ֑יךָ כַּאֲשֶׁ֖ר דִּבֶּ֥ר ה'

Devarim Chap 6: (18) Do what is right and good in **the eyes of Hashem**, that it may go well with you and that you may be able to possess the good land that Hashem your God promised to your fathers, (19) and that all your enemies may be driven out before you, as Hashem has spoken.

* 1. The Navi, *in Sefer Shoftim*, describes the following (17:6):

בַּיָּמִ֣ים הָהֵ֔ם אֵ֥ין מֶ֖לֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל אִ֛ישׁ הַיָּשָׁ֥ר **בְּעֵינָ֖יו** יַעֲשֶֽׂה׃

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was proper in **his own eyes**.

1. Why was there this period of Shoftim anyways?
   1. What was supposed to be happening during these 300 years?

רבי יהודה אומר ג' מצות נצטוו ישראל בכניסתן לארץ: להעמיד להם מלך, ולהכרית זרעו של עמלק, ולבנות להם בית הבחירה (סנהדרין כ:)

Rabbi Yehuda says: Three mitzvot were commanded to the Jewish people upon their entrance into Eretz Yisrael: They were commanded to establish a king for themselves (see Deuteronomy 17:14–15), and to cut off the seed of Amalek in war (see Deuteronomy 25:17–19), and to build the Beit Hamikdash.

* 1. See Ramban Bamidbar 16:21

**IV Outline of the Sefer**

1. Three sections of the *sefer*
   1. Chapters 1-2: Remaining conquest of the Land and Yehoshua’s final instructions
   2. Chapters 3-16: The stories of the 13 Shoftim, conquests and leadership
   3. Chapters 17-21: two disastrous national incidents and their aftermath
      1. Micha’s idol and *pilegesh (concubine) b’givah*
2. Devorah (Chap 4-5)
   1. Summons Barak to fight against Sisra, he insists that she join him, she agrees but informs him that it will not be for his glory but into the hands of a woman will Sisra be defeated. Sisra indeed loses, flees to the tent of Yael, who kills him with peg of the tent.
   2. Shirat Devorah
   3. Wailing of Sisra’s mother
3. Gideon (Chap 6-9)
   1. When chosen asks, why has this happened, what happened to the wonders of Mitzrayim?

**שופטים פרק ו:** יב וַיֵּרָ֥א אֵלָ֖יו מַלְאַ֣ךְ ה’ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֵלָ֔יו ה' עִמְּךָ֖ גִּבּ֥וֹר הֶחָֽיִל: יג וַיֹּ֨אמֶר אֵלָ֤יו גִּדְעוֹן֙ בִּ֣י אֲדֹנִ֔י וְיֵ֤שׁ ה' עִמָּ֔נוּ וְלָ֥מָּה מְצָאַ֖תְנוּ כׇּל־זֹ֑את וְאַיֵּ֣ה כׇל־נִפְלְאוֹתָ֡יו אֲשֶׁר֩ סִפְּרוּ־לָ֨נוּ אֲבוֹתֵ֜ינוּ לֵאמֹ֗ר הֲלֹ֤א מִמִּצְרַ֨יִם֙ הֶֽעֱלָ֣נוּ ה' וְעַתָּה֙ נְטָשָׁ֣נוּ ה' וַֽיִּתְּנֵ֖נוּ בְּכַ֥ף מִדְיָֽן: יד וַיִּ֤פֶן אֵלָיו֙ ה' וַיֹּ֗אמֶר לֵ֚ךְ בְּכֹֽחֲךָ֣ זֶ֔ה וְהֽוֹשַׁעְתָּ֥ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל מִכַּ֣ף מִדְיָ֑ן הֲלֹ֖א שְׁלַחְתִּֽיךָ:

* 1. Destroys the baal of his father who responds to the angry mob:

(30) The townspeople said to Yoash, “Bring out your son, for he must die: he has torn down the altar of Baal and cut down the sacred post beside it!” (31) But Yoash said to all who had risen against him, “Do you have to contend for Baal? Do you have to vindicate him? Whoever aggrieved him shall be dead by morning! If he is a god, let him fight his own battles, since it is his altar that has been torn down!”

1. Yiftach (Chap 11-12)
   1. Thrown from his father’s house, but sought out to lead to battle.
   2. Made a vow that if victorious, the first thing out of is house will be sanctified as an offering
      1. His daughter came out with drums and dances; after weeping two months, he “carried out his vow” (she never married)
   3. Civil war with Ephraim, who were angry they had not been invited to wage war
      1. שבלת סבלת
2. Shimshon (Chap 13-16)
   1. Angel appears to אשת מנוח that she will bear a *nazir* son
   2. He found pretexts to attack Philistines, married their women לשם שמים who converted; later became attracted to their beauty and led to his downfall
   3. Delila after 3 attempts finally gets him to reveal his secret, but he takes down the house with him.
3. *Pilegesh B’givah*
   1. Concubine runs from her husband to her father’s house, who seeks to appease her, after many delays sets out back home, purposely turns to the Jewish city of Givah in Binyamin, but no one takes him in. finally an old man does, but a lawless mob surround the house looking for the man, who throws out the concubine instead, who is molested and dies on the doorstep in the morning.
   2. He dismembers her and send a piece to every tribe, who respond with anger and demand the mob, Binyamin refuses and civil war breaks out. After two defeats, the Tribes annihilate Binyamin and take a vow never to marry their daughters.
   3. Remorse, and the idea to have the woman dance at the festival and be “taken” by Binyamin men

Addendum

שופטים פרק ג: ז וַיַּֽעֲשׂ֨וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֤ל אֶת־הָרַע֙ בְּעֵינֵ֣י ה' וַֽיִּשְׁכְּח֖וּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹֽהֵיהֶ֑ם וַיַּֽעַבְד֥וּ אֶת־הַבְּעָלִ֖ים וְאֶת־הָֽאֲשֵׁרֽוֹת: ח וַיִּֽחַר־אַ֤ף ה' בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וַֽיִּמְכְּרֵ֗ם בְּיַד֙ כּוּשַׁ֣ן רִשְׁעָתַ֔יִם מֶ֖לֶךְ אֲרַ֣ם נַֽהֲרָ֑יִם וַיַּֽעַבְד֧וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֛ל אֶת־כּוּשַׁ֥ן רִשְׁעָתַ֖יִם שְׁמֹנֶ֥ה שָׁנִֽים: ט וַיִּזְעֲק֤וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ אֶל ה' וַיָּ֨קֶם יְיָ֥ מוֹשִׁ֛יעַ לִבְנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל וַיּֽוֹשִׁיעֵ֑ם אֵ֚ת עׇתְנִיאֵ֣ל בֶּן־קְנַ֔ז אֲחִ֥י כָלֵ֖ב הַקָּטֹ֥ן מִמֶּֽנּוּ: י וַתְּהִ֨י עָלָ֥יו רֽוּחַ ה' וַיִּשְׁפֹּ֣ט אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל֒ וַיֵּצֵא֙ לַמִּלְחָמָ֔ה וַיִּתֵּ֤ן ה' בְּיָד֔וֹ אֶת־כּוּשַׁ֥ן רִשְׁעָתַ֖יִם מֶ֣לֶךְ אֲרָ֑ם וַתָּ֣עׇז יָד֔וֹ עַ֖ל כּוּשַׁ֥ן רִשְׁעָתָֽיִם: יא וַתִּשְׁקֹ֥ט הָאָ֖רֶץ אַרְבָּעִ֣ים שָׁנָ֑ה וַיָּ֖מׇת עׇתְנִיאֵ֥ל בֶּן־קְנַֽז: יב וַיֹּסִ֨פוּ֙ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל לַֽעֲשׂ֥וֹת הָרַ֖ע בְּעֵינֵ֣י ה' וַיְחַזֵּ֨ק ה' אֶת־עֶגְל֤וֹן מֶֽלֶךְ־מוֹאָב֙ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל עַ֛ל כִּֽי־עָשׂ֥וּ אֶת־הָרַ֖ע בְּעֵינֵ֥י ה': יג וַיֶּֽאֱסֹ֣ף אֵלָ֔יו אֶת־בְּנֵ֥י עַמּ֖וֹן וַֽעֲמָלֵ֑ק וַיֵּ֗לֶךְ וַיַּךְ֙ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וַיִּֽירְשׁ֖וּ אֶת־עִ֥יר הַתְּמָרִֽים: יד וַיַּֽעַבְד֤וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ אֶת־עֶגְל֣וֹן מֶֽלֶךְ־מוֹאָ֔ב שְׁמוֹנֶ֥ה עֶשְׂרֵ֖ה שָׁנָֽה: טו וַיִּזְעֲק֣וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֘ אֶל־ה'וַיָּ֩קֶם֩ ה' לָהֶ֜ם מוֹשִׁ֗יעַ אֶת־אֵה֤וּד בֶּן־גֵּרָא֙ בֶּן־הַיְמִינִ֔י אִ֥ישׁ אִטֵּ֖ר יַד־יְמִינ֑וֹ וַיִּשְׁלְח֨וּ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֤ל בְּיָדוֹ֙ מִנְחָ֔ה לְעֶגְל֖וֹן מֶ֥לֶךְ מוֹאָֽב:

Chapter 3: (7) The Israelites did what was offensive to Hashem; they ignored Hashem their G-d and worshiped the Baalim and the Asheroth. (8) Hashem became incensed at Israel and surrendered them to King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites were subject to Cushan-rishathaim for eight years. (9) The Israelites cried out to Hashem, and Hashem raised a champion for the Israelites to deliver them: Othniel the Kenizzite, a younger kinsman of Caleb. (10) The spirit of Hashem descended upon him and he became Israel’s chieftain. He went out to war, and Hashem delivered King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hands. He prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim, (11) and the land had peace for forty years. When Othniel the Kenizzite died, (12) the Israelites again did what was offensive to Hashem. And because they did what was offensive to Hashem, Hashem let King Eglon of Moab prevail over Israel. (13) [Eglon] brought the Ammonites and the Amalekites together under his command, and went and defeated Israel and occupied the City of Palms. (14) The Israelites were subject to King Eglon of Moab for eighteen years. (15) Then the Israelites cried out to Hashem, and Hashem raised up a champion for them: the Benjaminite Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed man. It happened that the Israelites sent tribute to King Eglon of Moab through him.

#2 יהושע פרק כד: (כב) וַיֹּ֨אמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁ֜עַ אֶל־הָעָ֗ם עֵדִ֤ים אַתֶּם֙ בָּכֶ֔ם כִּֽי־אַתֶּ֞ם בְּחַרְתֶּ֥ם לָכֶ֛ם אֶת ה' לַֽעֲבֹ֣ד אוֹת֑וֹ וַיֹּֽאמְר֖וּ עֵדִֽים: (כג) וְעַתָּ֕ה הָסִ֛ירוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵ֥י הַנֵּכָ֖ר אֲשֶׁ֣ר בְּקִרְבְּכֶ֑ם וְהַטּוּ֙ אֶת־לְבַבְכֶ֔ם אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: (כד) וַיֹּֽאמְר֥וּ הָעָ֖ם אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁ֑עַ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵ֨ינוּ֙ נַֽעֲבֹ֔ד וּבְקוֹל֖וֹ נִשְׁמָֽע:

#3 ואומר ([דברים יז, ט](/Deuteronomy.17.9)) ובאת אל הכהנים הלוים ואל השופט אשר יהיה בימים ההם וכי תעלה על דעתך שאדם הולך אצל הדיין שלא היה בימיו הא אין לך לילך אלא אצל שופט שבימיו ואומר ([קהלת ז, י](/Ecclesiastes.7.10)) אל תאמר מה היה שהימים הראשונים היו טובים מאלה: (ראש השנה כה:)

And it further says: “And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who shall be in those days” ([Deuteronomy 17:9](/Deuteronomy.17.9)). But can it enter your mind that a person can go to a judge that is not alive in his days? What, then, is the meaning of the phrase “in those days”? It teaches that you need to go only to the judge in one’s days, i.e., he is authorized to judge and decide matters. And it also says: “Do not say: How was it that the former days were better than these? For it is not out of wisdom that you inquire concerning this” ([Ecclesiastes 7:10](/Ecclesiastes.7.10)). Instead, one must accept the rulings of the leaders of his generation.

יפתח בדורו כשמואל בדורו ללמדך שאפילו קל שבקלין ונתמנה פרנס על הצבור הרי הוא כאביר שבאבירים

Jephthah in his generation is like Samuel in his generation. This serves to teach you that even the lightest of the light, i.e., the least distinguished individual, once he has been appointed as a leader over the community, he must be treated like the greatest of the great.