



# Judges Through the Centuries

By David M. Gunn

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## Judges Through the Centuries By David M. Gunn

This bible commentary traces the reception of *Judges* through the ages, not only by scholars and theologians, but also by preachers, teachers, politicians, poets, essayists and artists.

- A bible commentary focusing on *The Book of Judges*, best known for the tale of Samson and Delilah, but full of many other rich and colourful stories.
- Treats the text story by story, making it accessible to non-specialists,
- Considers the stories of women in *Judges*, including Deborah, Jael, who slew Sisera, and Jephthah's daughter, sacrificed by her father.
- Traces the reception of *Judges* through the ages, not only by scholars and theologians, but also by preachers, teachers, politicians, poets, essayists and artists.
- Illustrates how ideology and the social location of readers have shaped the way the book has been read.
- Discloses a long history of debate over the roles of women and the use of force, as well as Christian prejudice against Jews and 'Orientals'.
- Offers a window onto the use of the Bible in the Western world.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"A sometimes sober, sometimes whimsical, sometimes disturbing, sometimes delightful, and always enlightening journey through the centuries alongside all manner of Bible readers... Gunn has attempted a large feat here – to provide readers with a meaningful survey of over 2,000 years' worth of reception of the book of Judges – and has succeeded admirably. Hopefully, other volumes in the Blackwell series will live up to Gunn's example. This is an engaging and enlightening commentary that deserves attention from anyone interested in the history of the interpretation, use, and influence of the book of Judges." *The Bible and Critical Theory*

"In this first volume of the new Blackwell Bible Commentaries series to treat a book from the Tanak, David M. Gunn has not only provided a useful tool for students of the book of Judges but also established a new standard for biblical commentaries in general." *Review of Biblical Literature*

"If you want to know how learned rabbis and church fathers, Puritan divines and rationalist skeptics, musicians, painters and graphic artists, guardians of public morality and improvers of children's souls all wrested religious and moral significance from an unruly Book of Judges, this is the book for you. David Gunn selectively assembles some twenty centuries of professional and popular interpreters of the Book of Judges and provides a running commentary on how, in various times and places, these readers found meaning and instruction from the Book of Judges, often treasuring the book and sometimes recoiling from what they found to be its alien ways. Writing with humor and verve, Gunn provides thematic continuity among interpreters separated by centuries and alludes to social and political issues that help explain shifting interpretations. Mostly, however, David Gunn allows his choir to sing and his artists to imagine. The voices and illustrations have sometimes been univocal—as in consistently holding up Delilah as *femme fatale*. Very often they have been troubled and dissonant, finding conflicting allegories and ambiguous moral instruction in hair, heroic militarism, rapacious slaughter, sex, foxes, and sacrifice. Gunn, or rather the readers he assembles, offer eye-opening testimony that the Bible-as-cultural-force has never been a single thing, but a malleable text which people have received quite variously, depending on the changing circumstances in which they lived and the social issues they sought to address." *Burke O. Long, Bowdoin College*

"This is an exciting new commentary series, which presents a fresh and stimulating approach to understanding biblical interpretation. Leaving behind the verse by verse analysis typically found in commentaries, this series focuses instead on the broad spectrum of interpretations that have been applied to each story/textual unit by Jews and Christians throughout the ages.

Gunn's ground-breaking volume on Judges, the first in the series to treat an Old Testament book, is filled with many new insights and stimulating analyses. Gunn demonstrates very effectively that surveying the reception history of a particular passage focuses one's attention on key issues in an intriguing and often provocative way. Numerous perspectives for understanding each narrative in Judges are compared in a lively manner that highlights the many subtle nuances implicit in the text. Gunn's volume is thoroughly researched and exceptionally informative, and will provide a stellar model for subsequent volumes to emulate." *Alan J. Hauser, Appalachian State University*

"Gunn has attempted a large feat here - to provide readers with a meaningful survey of over 2,000 years' worth of reception of the book of Judges - and has succeeded admirably...This is an engaging and enlightening commentary that deserves attention from anyone interested in the history of the interpretation, use, and influence of the book Judges." **R.Christopher Heard, Pepperdine University California**

#### From the Back Cover

This commentary focuses on the Book of Judges, a fascinating biblical text; full of rich and colorful stories of which the best known is Samson and Delilah. It treats the text story by story, making it accessible to nonspecialists. Predominant are women's stories, which have both offended and inspired readers for centuries, including the stories of Deborah; Jael, who slew Sisera; and Jephthah's daughter, sacrificed by her father.

The commentary traces the reception of Judges through the ages, not only by scholars and theologians, but also by preachers, teachers, politicians, poets, essayists, and artists. It shows how ideology and the social location of readers have shaped the way the book has been read, disclosing a long history of debate over the roles of women and the use of force, as well as Christian prejudice against Jews and "Orientals." In this way, it offers a window onto the wider use of the Bible in the Western world. More information about the Blackwell Bible Commentaries series is available from the Blackwell website at [www.bbibcomm.net](http://www.bbibcomm.net)

#### About the Author

**David M. Gunn** holds the A. A. Bradford Chair of Religion at Texas Christian University. His other books include *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (1993) and *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (1993), as co-author, and *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book* (1996) and "Imagining" *Biblical Worlds: Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs* (2002), as co-editor. He is also co-author of the article on Judges in the *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (1999).

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