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**"... the evil in the eyes of the Lord" in The Book Of  
Judges**

**ABSTRACT**

**For receiving the educational degree of „Doctor“  
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# **CONTENTS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

<b>Relevance of the study and research on the subject</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Subject of the study</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Goals and tasks of the study</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Methods of the study</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Structure of the study</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. Isagogical notes on The Book of Judges</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. 1. Authorship and chronology</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. 2. Genre and structure</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2. An overview of the periods of “the evil in the eyes of the Lord” in Judges 2 and Judges 3</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. 1. Punishment (Judg. 2:1-5)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. 2. Israel commits "the evil" (Съд. 2:6-15)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. 3. Formulas for Divine anger and deliverance (Съд. 2:16-23)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2. 4. Cycles of idolatry</b>	<b>13</b>

<b>2. 5. "The evil in the eyes of the Lord" and "the prohibition" (חרם) in the redactional composition in Judges 3</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. 6. Othniel the deliverer (Judg. 3:7-11)</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. 7. Features of the second period of "evil" during the time of judges Ehud (Judg. 3:12-31)</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2. 8. Summary</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3. „The evil in the eyes of the Lord“ during the time of Deborah the prophetess and Gideon the judge (Judg. 4– 8)</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. 1. The redacted story in Judges 4</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. 2. The Song of Deborah (Judg. 5)</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3. 3. „The evil in the eyes of the Lord“ during the judgeship of Gideon—analysis of the description of an unknown prophet in Judg. 6:8-10</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3. 4. Gideon and the Angel of the Lord at Ophrah (Judg. 6:11-24)</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3. 5. Yahweh compared to „baal“ и „asherah“</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3. 6. Imperfections during the judgeship of Gideon and the making of the golden idol (Judg. 8:22-33)</b>	<b>16</b>

### **3. 7. Summary**

**17**

## **4. The periods of "the evil in the eyes of the Lord" in Judg. 9– 10 18**

### **4. 1. Abimelech, king of Shechem (Judg .9) 18**

### **4. 2. The religion of the Shechemites and „baal“ 20**

### **4. 3. „The evil” of Abimelech of Shechem 18**

### **4. 4. The content of Judg. 10:6-16 и source criticism 18**

### **4 .5. The motif of “the evil in the eyes of the Lord” in The Song of Moses 19**

### **4. 6. „The evil” according to the mercy of God. Judg. 10 in light of genre changes 18**

### **4. 7. Summary 20**

## **5. The Book of Judges– exegetical problems 21**

### **5.1. Phinehas and the tabernacle in The Book o Judges 21**

### **5. 2. The theme of “the evil in eyes of the Lord” in canonical, non-canonical and apocryphal literature 21**

<b>5. 3. Summary</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Excursus 1. "The evil in the eyes of the Lord" in Jewish apocalyptic writings</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Excursus 2. Committing “the evil in the eyes of the Lord” according to The Book of Zohar</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CONTRIBUTIVE ASPECTS OF THE DISSERTATION</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>ARTICLES ON THE SUBJECT OF THE DISSERTATION</b>	<b>26</b>

## INTRODUCTION

### **Relevance of the study and research on the subject.**

The relevance of the study of the Book of Judges of Israel is expressed in the fact that the repeated sins of the entire Chosen People in this narrative composition are part of a centuries-long crisis in the worship of Yahweh, culminating in the destruction of Solomon's temple and the Babylonian captivity. What is described as "evil in the eyes the Lord" in the Book of Judges, i.e. the worship of Canaanite deities, affects the understanding of important concepts such as chosenness, repentance and deliverance. The development of a sense of guilt among the Israelites must be viewed in relation to what the ancient way of worship was before the recording of the very canonical description of the events of the dawn of the Iron Age, which is found in the Book of Judges.

Basic research on the researched topic on the origin of the idea of awareness of national guilt in the Book of Judges is summarized. Emphasis is placed on Martin Noth's hypothesis of a deuteronomistic source, covering several books, namely Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Kings, and whose characteristic feature is the description of the consequences of idolatry. Works by Bulgarian biblical scholars who expressed their opinion on the hypothesis of a deuteronomistic source are cited. Among them are Archpriest Nikolay Shivarov, Ivaylo Naydenov, Emil Traichev, Ekaterina Damyanova, Dimitar Popmarinov. Comparisons are made with the exegetical study of the Book of Judges, published by Boyan Piperov in the 1960s.

## **Subject of the study**

The subject of the present study is the Book of Judges of Israel. The subject of study is the term “evil before the Lord” in the text units Judg. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6. The parts between Judg. 13–16 are not included in a separate chapter for reasons of the volume of the study, but the judgeship of Samson (which these parts in Judg. 13–16 narrate) is commented on as thematically related to the subject of the study.

## **Goals and tasks of the study**

The present study aims to trace the use of the term “evil before the Lord” in the Book of Judges of Israel and to determine what meaning is embedded in it – specifically in the book under study, as well as in relation to other textual sources in the Old Testament. To achieve the set goal, the following tasks should be specified. First, to present sufficient arguments for the date of composition of the Book of Judges and its connection with the hypothetical Deuteronomic source, in which the early worship of Israel is subjected to a new interpretation. Second, to trace whether prophetic themes of idolatry may have influenced the use of the term “evil in the eyes the Lord”.



## **Methods os the study**

The methods used in the course of the work are historical-critical, exegetical analysis, criticism of sources and tradition, criticism of genres and forms, and history of the impact of the text.

## **Structure of the study**

The study consists of 5 chapters and includes 2 excursions. Chapter 1 provides isagogical notes on the literary specifics and composition of the Book of Judges. Chapter 2 traces how the textual sections in Judg. 2–3 are composed and concludes with the establishment of the repetition of certain expressions. This repetition points to those chronological and genre problems according to which the use of the term “evil in the eyes the Lord” is interpreted in the study. Chapter 3 includes analyses of the materials for the eras of the leaders Deborah and Gideon from Judg. 4–8. Chapter 4 is an exception because the text examined therein about Abimelech (Judg. 9) does not have a complete terminological overlap with the subject of the study. This in turn requires paying more attention to the corresponding textual unit in Judg. 9. Chapter 4 also draws from the terminology of Judg. 10 more reliable evidence for achieving the goals of the study. Chapter 5 presents exegetical problems related to two elements: the ministry of the priest Phinehas in Judg. 20–21 and the presence of the theme of “evil before the Lord” in canonical, non-canonical and apocryphal sources. These two elements are identified as key to proving the Deuteronomic ideas in the

Book of Judges that stand behind the use of the term “evil before the Lord”. Excursus 1 provides information on texts from Jewish apocalyptic literature in which the meaning of the term “evil before the Lord” coincides with that of the Book of Judges. Excursus 2 is a brief presentation of how the idea of doing “evil in the eyes the Lord” from the era of the judges was further developed in a demonological Jewish source.

## **1.1 Authorship and chronology**

This subsection formulates additional theological problems in the interpretation of the Book of Judges, arising from the search for an answer to the question of its authorship.

## **1.2 Genre and structure**

This subsection complements the Deuteronomic hypothesis in a thematic plan. Excerpts from the Book of Judges of Israel are given, and as a reference in the description of its structure, the isagogical notes from the already mentioned study by Boyan Piperov are used.

## **2        An overview of the periods of "evil in the eyes of the Lord" в Judg. 2 and Judg. 3**

In the course of the analysis of the first textual section in Judg. 2, a reference is made to the thesis of Archpriest N. Shivarov about the presence of theological writings in Old Testament sources of similar origin. The corresponding thesis is used as the basis for the analyses in this chapter.

### **2.1        Punishment (Judg 2:1-5)**

The subsection is focused on different interpretations of a specific condemnatory speech to the people of Israel in Judges 2:1-5 and its place in the plot structure of the book. Genre forms from the Old Testament related to the text in Judges 2:1-5 are addressed.

### **2.2        Israel commits „the evil“ (Judg. 2:6-15)**

The subsection includes an analysis of the first use of the term "evil before the Lord" in the Book of Judges. Other expressions related to the practice of idolatry in different eras of the existence of the religious cult of Israel are commented on.

### **2.3        Formulas for Divine anger and deliverance (Judg. 2:16-23)**

The subsection emphasizes the rhetorical style of the Book of Judges, which is based on the use of the term “evil before the Lord.” Passages from Judges 2 are compared in a table that have similarities with other Old Testament text sections that

include the theme of idolatry and contain certain formulas for expressing this theme.

## **2.4 Cycles of idolatry**

This subsection presents a paradigm of the Deuteronomic narratives, i.e. sin-punishment-repentance. The established cyclicity in the Book of Judges is tied to the overall Deuteronomic plot about the national sins that led to the Babylonian captivity. The development of the theme of the consequences of “evil before the Lord” requires further comparisons of texts in tabular form.

### **2.5 „Evil in the eyes of the Lord“ and „the prohibition“ (חרם) in the redactional composition in Judges 3**

The subsection uses the criticism of literary forms in the analysis of the Old Testament genre of "prohibition", which is of fundamental importance for the construction of cause-and-effect relationships in the plot of the Book of Judges, or the cycles of committing "evil before the Lord".

## **2.6 Othniel the deliverer (Judg. 3:7-11)**

The subsection pays attention to the context of the region of Judea after the return of the Chosen People from Babylonian captivity. In interpreting the first cycle with the sending of a divinely inspired judge-deliverer after the repentance of the sinful people, the subsection clarifies the theological views to which the deuteronomic structure of presenting events is subordinated.

## **2.7 Features of the second period of “evil” during the time of judge Ehud (Judg. 3:12-31)**

The subsection analyzes the second stage of committing “evil before the Lord” through the criticism of sources and genre forms. In view of archaeological evidence of Canaanite culture from the time of the biblical judges-deliverers, it can be argued that the Deuteronomic corpus is composed not only of late theological works of a polemical nature, but also of historical materials from deep antiquity. The final form of the textual unit under consideration in Judg. 3 can be called an editorial compilation.

## **2.8 Summary**

After the analyses in this chapter, the following generalizations can be made. There is a compatibility between the ideas expressed in the Book of Deuteronomy and the source to which the Book of Judges belongs. The emphasized prophetic expression in the examined textual units, related to the assembly in the sanctuary of Bethel in Judg. 2 and the use of the rule of “prohibition” in describing “evil before the Lord” in Judg. 3, may be due to the anti-Samaritan polemic in the Deuteronomic corpus. Evidence has been offered of how older sources were edited and accommodated to the post-exilic political situation of the recording of the Book of Judges.

**3        „The evil in the eyes of the Lord“ during the time of Deborah the prophetess and Gideon the judge (Judg. 4– 8).**

### **3.1     The redacted story in Judges 4**

The subsection interprets the presence of a prophetess during the special reign of the redeeming judges. The hypothesis of the presence of Deuteronomic themes in the text unit Judg. 4 is discussed due to an obvious component of the narrative in it – predestination.

### **3.2     The Song of Deborah (Judg. 5)**

In the subsection it is considered necessary to provide a brief commentary on the main ideas of the Song of Deborah in Judges 5. The importance of this poetic source is enormous in supporting the view of a change in the ancient religion of Israel that took place before or after the Deuteronomic composition/editing of the texts.

**3.3     „The evil in the eyes of the Lord“ during the judgeship of Gideon– analysis of the description of an unknown prophet in Judg. 6:8-10**

The subsection applies the criticism of sources and genre forms. The unknown prophet described in Judg. 6:8-10 is distinguished from the divinely chosen charismatic judges-deliverers, but also the content of his speech is taken from a certain genre of condemnation of idolatry, which does not correspond ideologically to the religiosity of Israel in the early pre-monarchical era.

### **3.4 Gideon and the Angel of the Lord in Ophrah (Judg. 6:11-24)**

The subsection examines the material of the theophany of Gideon and the various elements of his representation in the narrative of the book as a judge-deliverer. The liturgical factors of the textual unit are interpreted when accepting the Deuteronomic hypothesis as plausible.

### **3.5 Yahweh compared to „baal“ и „asherah“**

The sub-section deals with evidence of the ideological struggle against the syncretic cult of "baal" and "asherah" adopted by the people of Israel. This evidence encompasses not only the terminology related to "evil before the Lord" in the story of Gideon's judgment, but also recent archaeological discoveries that highlight the seriousness of the problem of Israel's actual attitude towards Canaanite deities during the Iron Age.

### **3.6 Imperfections during the judgeship of Gideon and the making of the golden idol (Judg. 8:22-33).**

The subsection presents the respective shortcomings as deliberately constructed narrative elements in the Book of Judges. The cycle of Gideon's activities ends with information contained in Judg. 8:22-33, which resembles the Deuteronomic theological writings. Analyses of the terminology used in the description of how the charismatic Gideon fails to preserve the purity of local worship point to the



identification of conceptual components from the Deuteronomic source.

### **3.7 Summary**

The content of the texts in the interval between Judg. 4 and Judg. 8 is shaped according to the paradigm of the Deuteronomic corpus, in which the term “evil before the Lord” is subordinated to a certain idea of the beginning of Old Testament prophecy. The era of prophetic condemnations includes the time of the Book of Judges, i.e. this chronology was negatively assessed by the compilers of the Deuteronomic corpus. The very purpose of the stories of judges-deliverers in the book under review is not to impose an idealistic view of the past. The confirmed actual worship of the deities of the Canaanites in Judg. 6–8 is a hint at the course of later religious reforms that prompted the compilation of the genre of deuteronomic theological works.

## **4 The periods of „the evil in the eyes of the Lord“ in Judg. 9– 10**

### **4.1 Abimelech, king of Shechem (Judg. 9)**

The subsection proves the presence of ancient traditions in the story of Abimelech's accession to the throne in Judges 9 by emphasizing the fact that they are placed within the new narrative framework of the Deuteronomic source.

### **4.2 The religion of the Shechemites and „baal“**

The subsection includes an analysis of sources that are relevant to the acceptance of the possibility of an anti-Samaritan polemic in the Book of Judges of Israel. Information is provided about the ancient northern sanctuary at Shechem, where, according to the biblical text, Abimelech became king.

### **4.3 The evil of Abimelech or Shechem**

The subsection presents how the textual unit in Judg. 9 was conceived by the compiler of the Book of Judges as one of the successive cycles of “evil before the Lord.” The significance of the late political changes in the region of Samaria, related to the phenomenon of prophecy, is given as the basis for the anti-Samaritan polemic of the material under consideration about Abimelech.

### **4.4 The content of Суд. 10:6-16 and source criticism**

The subsection is important for the conclusion of the present study, as it makes

a connection between the already examined genre forms of the prophetic literature in the Old Testament and the specific structure of the unit in Judg. 10:6-16. It is emphasized that only in this cycle of doing “evil before the Lord” in the book does a dramatic dialogue between God and the entire people emerge. After comparing texts with a presumed Deuteronomic origin in tabular form, the study turns to a text from the Pentateuch that is connected with the theme of predestined idolatry, i.e. the Song of Moses (Deut. 32).

#### **4.5 The motif of „the evil in the eyes of the Lord“ in The Song of Moses**

The subsection aims to prove the similarity between the theological basis of the term “evil before the Lord” and the views of the compiler of the source in Deuteronomy 32. The search for such similarity requires the assumption that certain texts in the Pentateuch have a diachronic development depending on the Deuteronomic corpus.

#### **4.6 “The Evil” according to the mercy of God. Judges 10 in light of genre changes**

After the problem of the presence of mixed genres in the Book of Judges was pointed out at an earlier stage of the study, the present subsection pays more attention to this phenomenon in Old Testament literature, marked by Archpriest N. Shivarov. A relative mixing of the term “evil before the Lord” with other narrative patterns is presented in tabular form. Canonical and deuterocanonical texts are cited, related to

the genre changes that occurred, which clearly inspired the author of Judges. 10.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In conclusion, it can be said that chapters Judg. 9 and Judg. 10 occupy the central place in the narrative structure of the Book of Judges. This is due to the description of the time of Abimelech as a direct continuation of a cycle of “evil before the Lord”, after which the events in the book worsen, as well as to a literary aspect in Judg. 10. The scene with a ritual of renewal of the covenant in the text unit in Judg. 10 is identical to other such genre forms, the dating of which is post-exilic. Through this finding, the Deuteronomic hypothesis for the composition of the Book of Judges can be better argued.

## **5 The Book of Judges– exegetical problems**

### **5.1 Phinehas and the tabernacles in The Book of Judges**

In order to clarify the scale of the problem of the Deuteronomic redaction of materials in the Old Testament, this section contains an exegetical commentary on the texts in the Book of Judges dedicated to the high priest Phinehas.

### **5.2 The theme of “the evil in the eyes of the Lord” in canonical, non-canonical and apocryphal literature**

The subsection includes analyses of texts of various genres. The similarities between the use of the term "evil in the eyes the Lord" and the conceptual frameworks that served to write post-exilic sources with canonical, deuterocanonical and apocryphal status are presented in tabular form.

### **5.3 Summary**

As a conclusion from the discussion of the problem of the existence of a Deuteronomic redaction and its influence, it can be assumed that a post-exilic development of themes subordinate to the understanding of having done “evil before the Lord” is possible. One of them is the theme of the early priesthood before the crisis at the sanctuary of Shiloh, and the other is related to finding the reason why the Israelites were tempted by the sin of idolatry over such a long period of time. The fault lies with the native inhabitants of Canaan – the Amorites.

## **Excursus 1. „The evil in the eyes of the Lord“ in Jewish apocalyptic writings**

This excursus presents two sources from the apocryphal texts of the Jews of the Second Temple period: the Book of Jubilees and the Damascus Document, which is an original sectarian work of the cult community from the Dead Sea region. In both texts examined, the terminology of the Deuteronomic corpus is found, including the description "evil before the Lord." The idea that Israel's sinfulness dates back to deep antiquity is conveyed through the use and construction of the basic theological paradigm of the Book of Judges of Israel.

## **Excursus 2. Committing “the evil in the eyes of the Lord” according to the demonology of The Book of Zohar**

In view of the aforementioned Deuteronomic theme of searching for a cause for "evil before the Lord," the present excursus is a brief summary of the definition of the metaphysical aspect of the inclination to idolatry contained in the late mystical book called the Zohar. The universal guilt of the Chosen People is explained as caused by the action of evil spirits (this belief is not found in the Book of Judges).

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes with statements that should not be absolutized. In The Book of Judges, a borrowing of the term “the evil in the eyes the Lord” from a genre titled „theological writing“ is evident. The corresponding genre, which is found in the Book of Deuteronomy and the Historical Books of the Old Testament, is identified with specific theological positions of the Deuteronomic source of texts. In the event that the Book of Judges is perceived as a part of the Deuteronomic corpus, the studied topic of “the evil in the eyes the Lord” appears as subordinate to such concepts in Judaism that developed after the historical processes immediately after the Babylonian captivity, which in turn necessitated the composition of Deuteronomic texts. The period in which the term "evil before the Lord" began to be used cannot be dated earlier than the time of the great prophetic movement that emerged as a criticism of the syncretic worship in the Northern Kingdom (9th century BC). The anti-Samaritan polemic present in the Book of Judges of Israel points to its dating to the later context after the fall of the Northern Kingdom at the end of the 8th century BC. The analyses illustrate how the conviction in God's punishment for idolatry in the northern sanctuaries of the Israelites first became the basis for a critical assessment through terms such as "the evil in the eyes of the Lord."

The atmosphere of separation from Canaanite religion explains why themes in post-exilic praise texts correspond to those in the prophetic speeches in the

deuteronomic narrative of the Book of Judges. A fusion of genres is explained only by the composition of the Deuteronomic books and the paradigm of sin-punishment-repentance. Related to this paradigm are two post-exilic deuteronomic ideas that found their place in the Pentateuch and continued the rhetoric of the Book of Judges of Israel. The first is the idea of identifying the pagan Amorites as the root cause of “evil before the Lord,” and the second is that of the position of the Sadducean priests. The biblical information about the high priest Phinehas—specifically his leadership in the chronology of the Book of Judges—should be interpreted as attempts at polemicization and a deliberate anachronism in the history of how the priestly institution developed. The Deuteronomic definition of "evil before the Lord" as worship of pagan deities with common names, respectively "baals", "astartes" and "asherahs", should point to future discussions on the problem of what the ancient religion of Israel in the pre-monarchical era actually was.



## **Contributive aspects of the dissertation**

The dissertation exhibits the following contributive aspects:

1. In this study, an attempt is made to analyze the Book of Judges from the perspective of source criticism, and in parallel, the documentary theory of the origin of the Pentateuch is also touched upon. The term “the evil in the eyes of the Lord” is developed as important for future understanding of the problems of textual criticism that arise in the study of the Pentateuch.

2. The materials cited as examples from the Dead Sea Scrolls have not been included in a Bulgarian study of the theology of the Book of Judges so far. Among these materials are the "Apocryphon of Joshua," the "Apocryphon of Josephus," the "Words of Moses," and fragments of the "Damascus Document."

## **Publications on the subject of the dissertation**

1. Zoran Kalev, Ehud's Mission: Aspects of Early Israelite Religion in Judges 3:12-20, Forum Theologicum Sardicense, vol:XXVII, issue:1, 2022, pages:95-100, ISSN (print):1310-7909.

2. Zoran Kalev, The speech of the Angel of the Lord in Judg. 6:11-16, Forum Theologicum Sardicense, том:XXVII, брой:II, 2022, ISSN (print):1310-7909.

3. Zoran Kalev, The Topic of “Sin” in Judg. 10:6-16, Forum Theologicum Sardicense, I, 2023, p.:145-156, ISSN (print):1310-7909.

4. Зоран Калев, The Hebrew term "evil" (ra) as a definition of sin according to the Qurmran sect, Forum Theologicum Sardicense, II, 2023, p.:83-94, ISSN (print):1310-7909.

5. Zoran Kalev, A Midrash on the evil of angels in the Aramaic apocrypha 1Q Gen. Ap. (A review of new hypotheses after the original study of prof. Slavcho Valchanov), Сборник Изследвания върху Стария Завет. Библейска библиотека том 13, 2024, p.:61-72, Ref.