

# Judges

## I. The Main Idea of Judges

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The book of Judges records the failure of the people to be faithful to the covenant and the oppression they suffered as a consequence.

But it also records God's grace and faithfulness to deliver them time and time again.

## II. Outline of Judges

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|------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Judges 1:1-3:6   | Introduction: Military and Religious Failure     |
| Judges 3:7-16:31 | The Downward Spiral of Rebellion and Deliverance |
| Judges 17-21     | Conclusion: Religious and Military Failure       |

## III. Interpretive Keys to Judges

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- Genre: Historical Narrative
  - The author of Judges intends to communicate historical events. It doesn't tell us everything we may want to know about history, but what it does tell us is a truthful account of the past.
- What was a "judge"?
  - "It is clear that these individuals were selected and empowered by Yahweh alone to meet certain emergencies and that their office was not hereditary. It is likewise apparent that the term 'judge' does not suggest a juridical function, since that responsibility fell to the elders, but rather **the office of a military leader and protector**. ... In Israel in the era between the great covenant mediators (Moses and Joshua) and the kings, the judges served as ad hoc governors and generals entrusted with the task of delivering the people from the enemies who harassed them repeatedly throughout these centuries." --Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of*

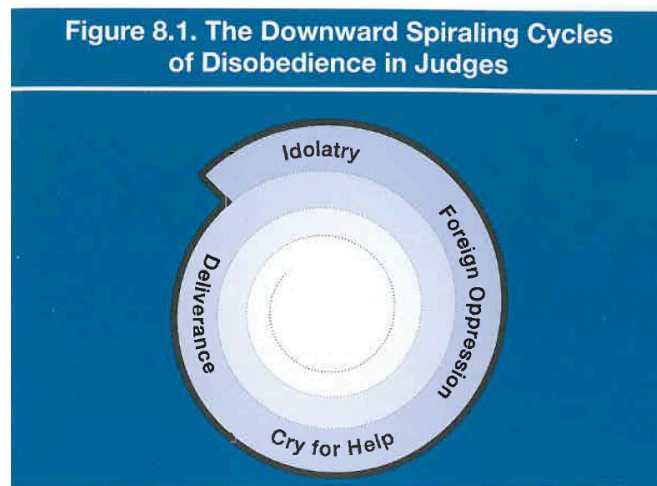
*Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2008), 181-182.

- Regarding them lacking a “juridical function,” one exception to this was Deborah who had a judicial role according to Judg. 4:5. However, Deborah was also instrumental in bringing about a military victory for the Israelites as well, so even she still fits the rest of Merrill’s definition of a “judge.”
- How many judges were there?
  - 14 (Not including Abimelech, but including Eli & Samuel; see 1 Sam. 4:18 & 7:15.)
- How long was the period of the judges?
  - The time periods given in the book of Judges must overlap some in order to match other biblical information we have about how long the period was between Joshua and the Israelite kings (see 1 Kgs. 6:1; Jdg. 11:26; 1 Chr. 6:33-37).
  - The fact that they overlap makes sense because each judge was a regional leader. Tribes in one area of the country could be experiencing oppression while those in another area could be experiencing deliverance.
    - Note also that Judges 10:7 states that the Philistine (oppression from the west) and the Ammonite oppression (from the east) began at the same time, clearly indicating some overlap.
  - Given all the biblical evidence, the period of the judges was about 310 years long, beginning with the death of Joshua’s generation (ca. 1360 B.C.) to the beginning of Saul’s reign (ca. 1050 B.C.). (Note that this includes the judgeship of Samuel.)

| <b><u>Oppressors</u></b> | <b><u>Years of Oppression</u></b> | <b><u>Judge</u></b> | <b><u>Deliverance &amp; Rest</u></b> | <b><u>Total</u></b> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Mesopotamians            | 8 years                           | 1. Othniel          | 40 years                             | 48 years            |
| Moabites                 | 18 years                          | 2. Ehud             | 80 years                             | 98 years            |
| Philistines              | not stated                        | 3. Shamgar          | not stated                           | not stated          |
| Canaanites               | 20 years                          | 4. Deborah & Barak  | 40 years                             | 60 years            |
| Midianites               | 7 years                           | 5. Gideon           | 40 years                             | 47 years            |
|                          |                                   | (Abimelech)         | 3 years                              | 3 years             |
|                          |                                   | 6. Tola             | 23 years                             | 23 years            |
|                          |                                   | 7. Jair             | 22 years                             | 22 years            |
| Ammonites                | 18 years                          | 8. Jephthah         | 6 years                              | 24 years            |
|                          |                                   | 9. Ibzan            | 7 years                              | 7 years             |
|                          |                                   | 10. Elon            | 10 years                             | 10 years            |
|                          |                                   | 11. Abdon           | 8 years                              | 8 years             |

| <u><b>Oppressors</b></u> | <u><b>Years of Oppression</b></u> | <u><b>Judge</b></u> | <u><b>Deliverance &amp; Rest</b></u> | <u><b>Total</b></u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Philistines              | 40 years                          | 12. Samson          | (20 years)                           | 20 years            |
| Philistines              |                                   | 13. Eli             | (40 years)                           | 40 years            |
| Philistines              |                                   | 14. Samuel          | (34 years)                           | 34 years            |
| <b>Sum Total:</b>        |                                   |                     |                                      | <b>484 years</b>    |
| <b>Actual Total:</b>     | <b>310 years</b>                  |                     |                                      |                     |

- The Cycle Within the Book of Judges
  - The book of Judges is a patterned history of Israel, recording the history between Joshua and Samuel. The pattern is a cycle:
    - Idolatry
    - Foreign Oppression
    - Cry for Help
    - Deliverance
  - But it is not a circle, it is a downward spiral. Each generation gets more and more sinful, and each judge gets more and more sinful.



## IV. Key Passages of Judges

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### Recurring phrases within the book of Judges:

- Judges 14:3 “But his father and mother said to him, ‘Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?’ But Samson said to his father, ‘Get her for me, for **she is right in my eyes.**”
- Judges 14:7 “Then he went down and talked with the woman, and **she was right in Samson’s eyes.**”
- Judges 17:6 “In those days there was no king in Israel. **Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**”
- Judges 18:1 “In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them.”
- Judges 19:1 “In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.”
- Judges 21:25 [Last verse of the book.] “In those days there was no king in Israel. **Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**”

### What was the significance of these phrases?

#### “In those days there was no king in Israel.”

This phrase pointed to the need for a godly king who would teach the people right from wrong and lead them in the right direction.

- Although this was partially fulfilled in David and the other godly kings of Israel, it is ultimately and perfectly fulfilled in Christ.

#### **“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”**

This phrase describes the autonomous nature of the Israelites during this period.

- Each person, family, and tribe were choosing for themselves what is right and wrong. The actions of Samson and the story of the migration of the Danites (including their recruitment of a Levite to be their priest) illustrate what this looked like on a day to day basis.

Deuteronomy 12:8 uses the same phrase (“everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes”) in the context of proper worship.

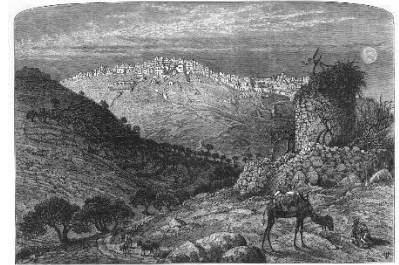
- In Deut. 12:1-3, Moses commands the Israelites to destroy the Canaanite idols and places of worship. In verses 4-14, Moses commands them to only offer their sacrifices at “the place that the Lord your God will choose.” In the book of Judges, the people were doing neither one. The Israelites were worshiping other gods and worshiping Yahweh in whatever way *they* chose.

### Judges 17-21 – Two Concluding Stories

After recording the downward spiral of the Israelites during this period, the book of Judges ends with two stories: The Migration of the Danites, and the Civil War with all the tribes fighting the tribe of Benjamin.

#### What was the point of these stories?

- First, as mentioned above, these stories further highlight how Israel needed a king and how everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.
- Second, both of these stories involve the city of Bethlehem in some way.
  - Judges 17:7 “Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.”
  - Judges 19:1 “In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.”



In a subtle way, the book of Judges (along with the book of Ruth, which is centered around Bethlehem) is preparing the reader for 1 Samuel, where a certain young shepherd from Bethlehem will be chosen by God to lead the nation.

## V. Messianic Elements within Judges

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### Type of Christ: The Judges

- Similar to Joshua, the judges are a type of Jesus Christ in that they deliver the people from dangerous situations.
- But the book of Judges as a whole points to the need for a godly king.
  - The refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” pointed to the need for a godly king who would teach the people right from wrong and lead them in the right direction. As noted above, this was partially fulfilled in David and the other godly kings of Israel, it is ultimately and perfectly fulfilled in Christ.