



JUDGES

A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JUDGES

JUDGES INTRODUCTION

A Philosophy of History

“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34)

WRITER: Unknown

This book comes from the period of the monarchy, judging by the phrase which occurs 4 times, *“In those days there was no king in Israel”* (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Probably written by Samuel.

KEY VERSE: Judges 21:25 (last verse in book)

THEME: Backsliding — and the amazing grace of God in recovering and restoring.

PURPOSE: The Book of Judges serves a twofold purpose:

1. Historically it records the history of the nation from the death of Joshua to Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. It bridges the gap between Joshua and the rise of the monarchy. There was no leader to take Joshua’s place in the way he had taken Moses’ place. This was the trial period of the theocracy after they entered the land.

2. Morally it is the time of the deep declension of the people as they turned from the Unseen Leader and descended to the low level of *“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 17:6; also compare Judges 1:1 with 20:18). This should have been an era of glowing progress, but it was a dark day of repeated failure.

This course can be plotted like a hoop rolling down the hill of time. The steps of a nation’s downfall are outlined in the last division of the book (see out-

line). Isaiah, chapter 1, presents these same fatal steps downward that eventually led to the final captivity of the nation.

COMMENT:

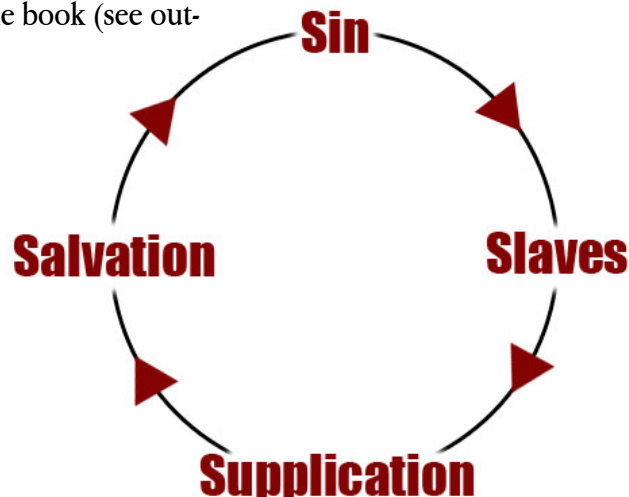
The New Scofield Reference Bible gives as the theme of the Book of Judges *“Defeat and Deliverance.”* This is unusually appropriate. There is, however, another aspect which this book emphasizes — disappointment.

The children of Israel entered the Land of Promise with high hopes and exuberant expectation. You would expect these people — who were delivered out of Egypt, led through the wilderness, and brought into the land with such demonstration of God’s power and direction — to attain a high level of living and victory in the land. Such was not the case. They failed ignobly and suffered miserable defeat after defeat.

God raised up judges to deliver His people when they apostatized and cried to Him in their misery. The book takes its name from these men whom God raised up. The judges exercised their ministry for the most part in a local and restricted area.

All the judges were themselves limited in their capabilities. In fact, each one seemed to have some defect and handicap which was not a hindrance but became a positive asset under the sovereign direction of God. None of them were national leaders who appealed to the total nation as were Moses and Joshua. The record is not continuous but rather a spotty account of local judges in limited sections of the nation.

-J. Vernon McGee



THE BOOK OF JUDGES IS A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE that contrasts God's faithfulness with Israel's apostasy. Despite the repeated falling away of His people, God provided deliverers—the judges—time and again. He did not do this unthinkingly or mechanically, nor was He manipulated by Israel's cries for help (3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10). He did not spare Israel from the consequences of its actions, as its constant trouble with foreign oppressors indicates. Rather, God delivered Israel from oppression because of His promises to Abraham and his descendants. He remembered His vow to give the land of Canaan to Israel. Thus, the preservation of God's people was not due to their merit or goodness, nor even to their willingness to repent. Rather, God demonstrated His compassion and pity on a wayward people who grieved Him continually (2:16, 18) by providing bold leaders to rescue them. In fact, the real hero of Judges is God Himself, who alone remains faithful despite the failings of His people—and even of the judges.

The book was written to show the consequences of disobedience to God and the necessity of summoning a righteous king who would lead the people to God. In contrast to the serene way in which the Book of Joshua ends, with Israel in harmony with God's commands, Judges reveals that Israel began to disobey God even in the time of Joshua, and that this disobedience grew more serious—and more debased—over time. Judges 2:16–23 establishes the cyclical pattern of sin, slavery, and salvation that would dominate the time of the judges. However, the book makes clear that the cycle had a downward spiral. Each new outbreak of disobedience and idolatry took Israel further away from God and deeper into sin and misery. By the end of the book, it is clear that Israel had violated its covenant with God in almost every imaginable way. The purpose of the message is supported by the structure of the book itself. A close examination of chs. 17–21 leads to the conclusion that they are out of sequence with the events in the earlier chapters. Clues within the text support the theory that the events described in these latter chapters actually took place early in the period of the judges. For instance, we see the near unanimous action of Israel's tribal convocation, which successfully unites to take punitive action against Benjamin in ch. 20. This tribal league

was clearly active during the time of Phinehas and in Joshua's day (Josh. 22:9–34). In these chapters, the Philistines are not mentioned as a military threat; the military campaigns described in chs. 20 and 21 would have been unlikely in later times, when the Philistines dominated much of Israel's territory. Furthermore, Bethel and Mizpah are both named as sites of a major religious sanctuary (20:1, 18, 31; 21:1) rather than Shiloh, which was a more prominent religious center in the Philistine period (1 Sam. 1:3, 9; 3:21; 4:4). This arrangement of the narrative, while not strictly chronological, reinforces the theme that the period of the judges was one of steep decline. The sordid events in these last chapters, while they may have occurred early in the period, are purposely placed at the end of the book as a fitting epitaph to a degenerate time. The author of this collection of historical writings about the judges, who ruled Israel during a span of several centuries, is never identified. Neither are there any clues elsewhere in Scripture. Late Jewish tradition ascribed its authorship to Samuel. This is certainly possible, but there is no way of knowing for sure. Certainly the book was written after the last events recorded in it (about 1050 B.C.). The reference in 18:30 to "the day of the captivity of the land" refers most likely to the Babylonian exile (sixth century B.C.). This suggests that a later version of the book may have been compiled during the Exile or afterward. However, the reference to Jebusites living in Jerusalem "to this day" (1:21) suggests that a portion of the book may have been written prior to David's capture of Jerusalem around 1000 B.C. It would seem likely that Jebusites who survived the battle would have left voluntarily or been expelled. Yet a few scriptural references suggest that some Jebusites remained in Jerusalem after David's conquest (2 Sam. 24:16), so this is not a conclusive argument. If one believes that Judges was written sometime late in the eleventh century B.C., then it becomes more credible to suggest that Samuel wrote most or all the book. Yet, like the question of authorship, the approximate date of the composition of Judges remains cloaked in uncertainty.

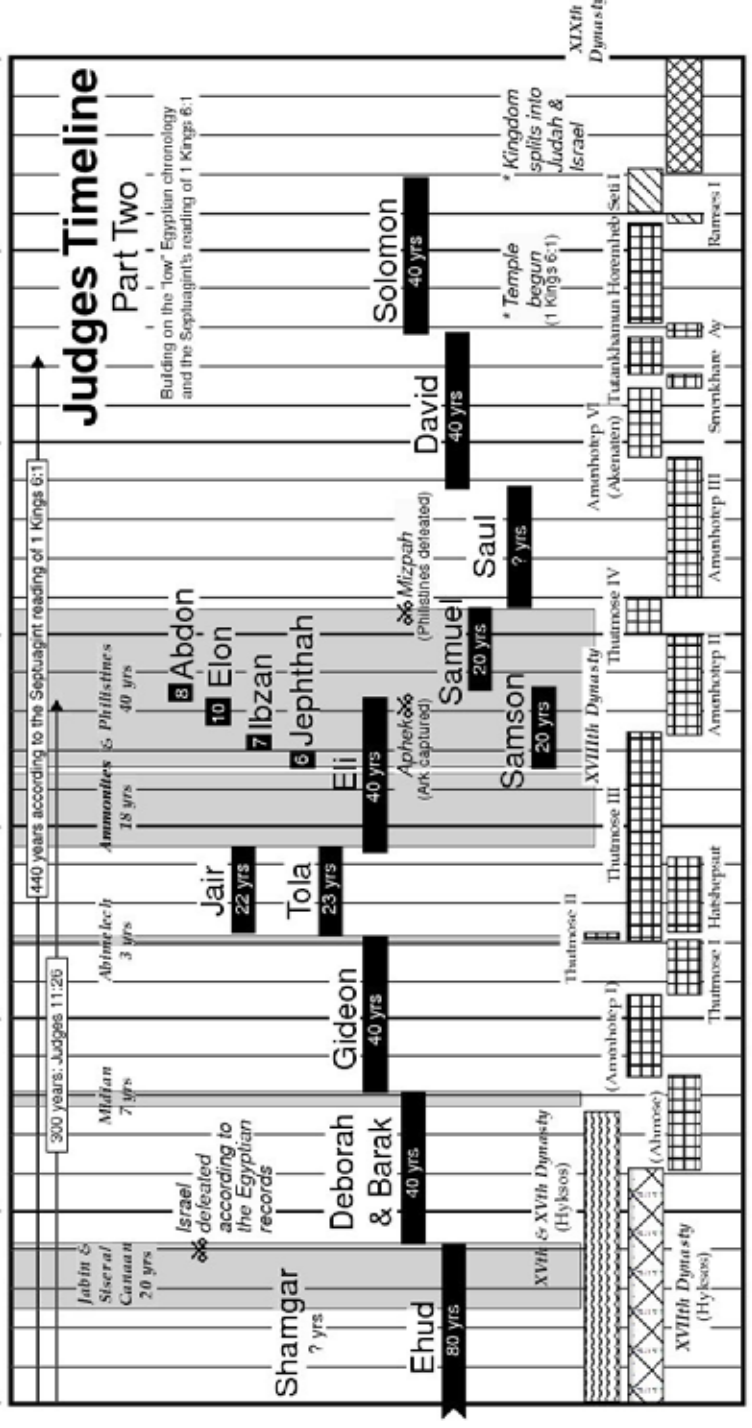
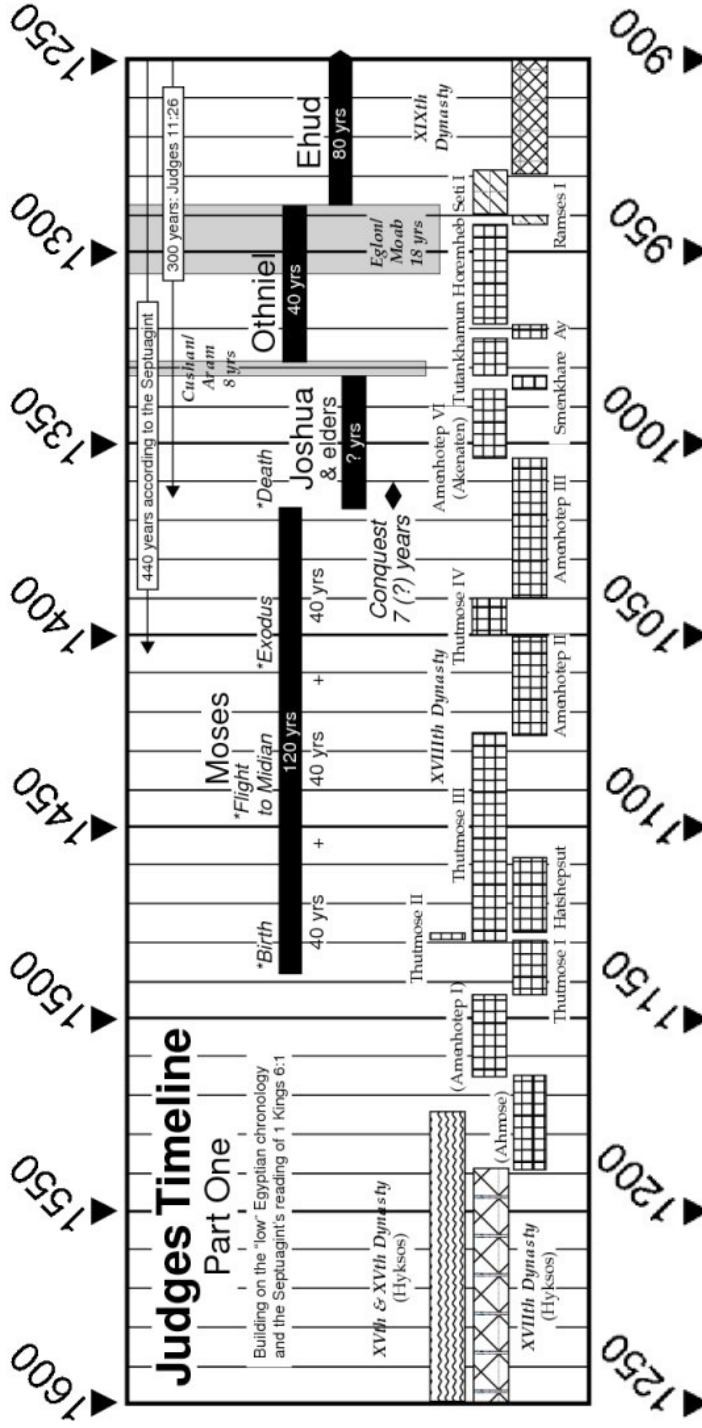
Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary (Jdg). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

Cycle of the Judges

Cycle	First 3:7-11	Second 3:12-30	Third 4:1—5:31	Fourth 6:1—8:32	Fifth 10:6—12:7	Sixth 13:1-16:31	
SIN	“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves...”	“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord...”	“And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord when Ehud was dead...”	“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord...”	“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim and Ashtaroth and the gods of Syria... Zidon... Moab... Amon... Philistines, and forsook the Lord”	“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord...”	
SUFFERING	“Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, King of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served... eight years... ”	“And the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel... So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years... ”	“And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles...”	“And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years... ”	“And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon...”	“And the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years... ”	“And the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years... ”
SUPPLICATION	“And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord...”	“But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord...”	“And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel...”	“And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord: And it came to pass when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of Midianites...”	“And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, ‘We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim... Deliver us only we pray Thee...’”	“And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, saying, ‘We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim... Deliver us only we pray Thee...’”	
SALVATION	“The Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother...”	“The Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed...”	“And Deborah, a prophetess, she judged Israel at that time... and she called Barak, the son of Abinoam...”	“And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite; and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress...”	“Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead... thus the children of Ammon were subdued...”	“The angel of the Lord appeared and said... he (Samson) shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”	
Period of Rest	40 years	80 years	40 years	40 years	6 years	20 years	

JUDGES

Causes of Failure Incomplete obedience (1:1-2:5) Idolatry (2:6-3:4) Intermarriage 3:5-6	Course of Failure 	Curses from Failure Idolatry → Immorality → Anarchy SAMUEL ca. 1075 BC
Defeat (1) Review (2) CHAPTERS 1-2		Micah (family) (17) Danites (tribe) (18) Levite and concubine (19) Civil war (20) Mourning (21) CHAPTERS 17-21
DEFEAT		DISGRACE
Theme	Compromise brings failure.	
Key Verses	17:6; 21:25	
Christ in Judges	Prefigured as the ultimate judge and deliverer	



ISRAEL IN THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

The 12 Judges of Israel

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|-----------------------|------------|
| 1. Othniel of Judah | 3:7-11 |
| 2. Ehud of Benjamin | 3:12-30 |
| 3. Shamgar | 3:31 |
| 4. Deborah of Ephraim | 4:1-5:31 |
| 5. Gideon of Manasseh | 6:1-8:35 |
| 6. Tola of Issachar | 10:1-2 |
| 7. Jair of Gilead | 10:3-5 |
| 8. Jephthah of Gilead | 10:6-11:40 |
| 9. Ibzan of Bethlehem | 12:8-10 |
| 10. Elon of Zebulun | 12:11-12 |
| 11. Abdon of Ephraim | 12:13-15 |
| 12. Samson of Dan | 13:1-16:31 |



OUTLINE OF JUDGES

- I. Prologue: the stalled conquest of Canaan (1:1–2:5)**
 - A. Advance and retreat in the south (1:1–21)
 - B. Advance and retreat in the north (1:22–36)
 - C. The Angel of the Lord’s chastisement of Israel (2:1–5)

- II. Israel under the judges (2:6–16:31)**
 - A. Introduction to the period (2:6–3:6)
 - B. The first judges (3:7–31)
 - 1. Othniel’s defeat of Cushan-Rishathaim (3:7–11)
 - 2. Ehud’s defeat of Moab (3:12–30)
 - 3. Shamgar’s slaughter of the Philistines (3:31)
 - C. Deborah and Barak’s triumph over Canaan (4:1–5:31)
 - 1. Victory in the north and the death of Sisera (4:1–24)
 - 2. The victory hymn of Deborah and Barak (5:1–31)
 - D. Gideon’s rout of the Midianites (6:1–8:32)
 - 1. Israel’s continuing apostasy (6:1–10)
 - 2. Gideon’s call (6:11–40)
 - 3. Gideon’s victory over the Midianites (7:1–8:3)
 - 4. Gideon’s pursuit of the kings of Midian (8:4–28)
 - 5. Gideon’s sons (8:29–32)
 - E. Abimelech’s violent reign (8:33–9:57)
 - 1. Abimelech’s rise (9:1–6)
 - 2. Jotham’s fable (9:7–21)
 - 3. Abimelech’s destruction of Shechem (9:22–55)
 - 4. Conclusion (9:56–57)
 - F. Minor judges: Tola and Jair (10:1–5)
 - G. Jephthah’s repulsion of the Ammonites (10:6–12:7)
 - 1. Israel’s distress and Jephthah’s calling (10:6–11:3)
 - 2. Jephthah’s commission (11:4–11)
 - 3. Diplomatic discussions with Ammon (11:12–28)
 - 4. Victory and Jephthah’s foolish vow (11:29–40)
 - 5. Jephthah and Ephraim (12:1–7)
 - H. Other minor judges: Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12:8–15)
 - I. Samson and the Philistines (13:1–16:31)
 - 1. The Angel’s visit to Manoah and his wife (13:1–25)
 - 2. Samson’s exploits against the Philistines (14:1–15:20)
 - 3. Samson’s capture and last triumph (16:1–31)

- III. Epilogue: discord among the tribes (17:1–21:25)**
 - A. Micah’s idolatry and the Danite conquest of Laish (17:1–18:31)
 - B. The Levite concubine and the war against Benjamin (19:1–21:25)