

Judges

Authorship: Unknown. Some have suggested that Samuel, considered by some to have been Israel's last judge (see 1 Samuel 7:6, 15-17; Acts 13:20), may have compiled the records of his predecessors.

Date: Approximately c. 1051 B.C. – 1004 B.C.

The events described in Judges, from just after the death of Joshua to the beginning of the monarchy, span 335 years (1380 B.C. – 1045 B.C.). The recurring observation that “in those days Israel had no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) suggests that Judges was written during the monarchy, perhaps c. 10:20 B.C. This means that Samuel, who lived about 30 to 40 years into the reign of Saul, could have been its author. Concerning the New Testament suggestion that the period of the judges lasted some 450 years (Acts 13:20 KJV), see the NLT or NIV for that verse.

Background: Now that the Israelites were settled in the Promised Land, they began to experience the twin problems of compromise and apostasy: As they compromised on their mandate to completely eradicate the depraved Canaanites, they repeatedly fell into the idolatry and immorality of those nations. This would lead to a series of military defeats, followed by deliverance by a series of “judges.” These judges were not legal administrators but strong leaders who helped the nation deal with each successive crisis.

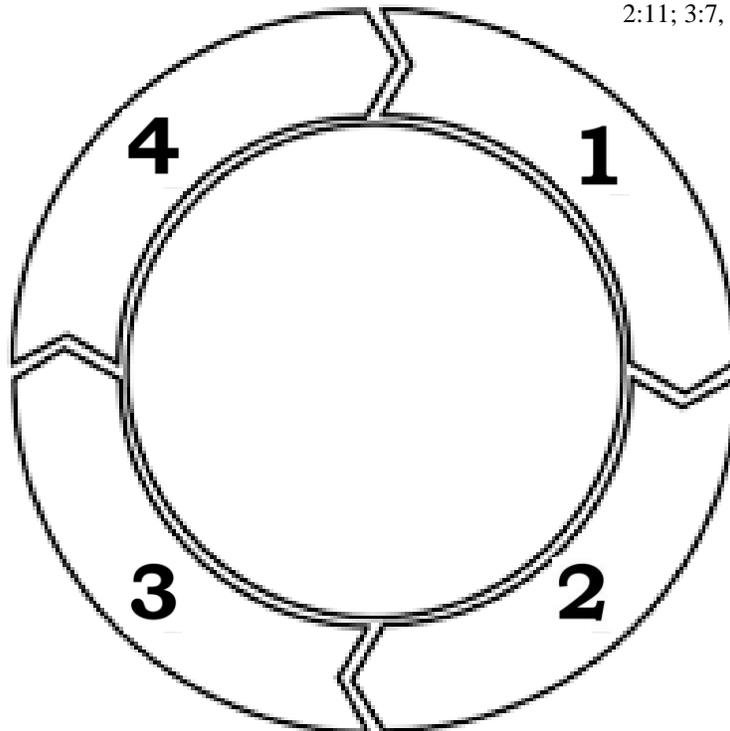
Israel's moral condition grew progressively worse as the downward cycle was repeated (See Illustration Below). Each time a judge died, “the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them” (2:19).

The Hebrew word translated “judge” *SHOFETIM* comes from a word meaning “to exercise authority.” The judges were people who used their authority to save or “deliver” Israel from oppression. Various forms of *judge* occur 20 times in the book of Judges; various forms of *deliver* occur 48 times.

Repeated Cycle in Judges

4. SALVATION (Deliverance) “Restoration”

1. SIN “Apostasy” (Israel “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight” 2:11; 3:7, 12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1)



Judges:

1. Othniel (1:12-13; 3:7-11)
2. Ehud (3:12-30)
3. Shamgar (3:31)
4. Deborah (4-5)
5. Gideon (6-8)
6. Tola (10:1-2)
7. Jair (10:3-5)
8. Jephthah (11:1-12:7)
9. Ibzan (12:8-10)
10. Elon (12:11-12)
11. Abdon (12:13-15)
12. Samson (13-16)

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets (1 & 2 Samuel)

Repeated Cycles:

1. Sin
2. Suffering
3. Supplication
4. Salvation

Corresponding Themes:

1. Apostasy
2. Oppression
3. Repentance
4. Restoration

3. SUPPLICATION (to God) “Repentance”

2. SUFFERING (because of Sin) “Oppression”

Israel's moral condition grew progressively worse as the downward cycle was repeated. Each time a judge died, “the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them” (2:19).

NOTE: There are different illustrations of the cycle. The cycle would begin with a time where the Israelites enjoyed the peace of God. That time would be followed by a time of Sin and apostasy which would lead to God's judgment where the Israelites suffered under the consequences of Sin. This would lead the Israelites into a time of repentance and calling out to the LORD. The LORD would respond to the cries of His people and raise up a judge to help deliver them. Then the cycle would continue.

Purpose: The purpose of the book of Judges is twofold:

- (1) To show the external threat of defeat by other nations is not as serious as the internal threat of moral depravity and idolatry; indeed, external threats always result from internal problems;
- (2) To show Israel why human kingship became necessary for their nation: The Lord was to be their King, as Gideon acknowledged (8:23), but they were so wicked that human kingship became necessary. The writer sees a causal relationship between the fact that there was no king in Israel and the fact that "people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (17:6; 21:25).

Outline:

I. Prologue: Failed obedience in the Promised Land (Chapters 1:1-3:6)

- A. Failure to completely possess the land (1:1-2:5)**
- B. Failure to obey Yahweh and the consequences of disobedience (Chapters 2:6-3:6)**

II. Cycles demonstrating Israel's degenerating disobedience (3:7-16:31)

- A. Cycle 1 (3:7-11)**
 1. Disobedience (3:7)
 2. Discipline through Aram Naharaim (3:8)
 3. Deliverance through (Othniel (3:9-11))
- B. Cycle 2 (3:12-31)**
 1. Disobedience (3:12)
 2. Discipline through Eglon (3:13-14)
 3. Deliverance through Ehud (3:15-30)
 4. Deliverance from Philistines through Shamgar (3:31)
- C. Cycle 3 (4-5)**
 1. Disobedience (4:1)
 2. Discipline through Jaban (4:2-3)
 3. Deliverance through Deborah and Barak (4:4-5:31)
- D. Cycle 4 (6:1-8:32)**
 1. Disobedience (6:1)
 2. Discipline through Midian (6:1-6)
 3. Deliverance through Gideon (6:7-8:32)
- E. Cycle 5 (8:33-10:5)**
 1. Israel's return to idolatry (8:33-35)
 2. Abimelech's usurpation and punishment (9:1-57)
 3. Deliverance through Tola and Jair (10:1-5)
- F. Cycle 6 (10:6-12:15)**
 1. Disobedience (10:6)
 2. Discipline through Ammonites (10:7-18)
 3. Deliverance through Jephthah (11:1-12:7)
 4. Leadership of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15)
- G. Cycle 7 (13-16)**
 1. Disobedience (13:1)
 2. Discipline through Philistines (13:1)
 3. Deliverance through Samson (13:2-16:31)

III. Epilogue: Degenerate condition of leaderless Israel (17-21)

- A. Idolatry of Micah and Danites (17-18)**
- B. Immorality of Gibeah and Benjamites (19:1-21:24)**
- C. Summary of immoral, leaderless Israel (21:25)**

Meaning of the Name "Judges"

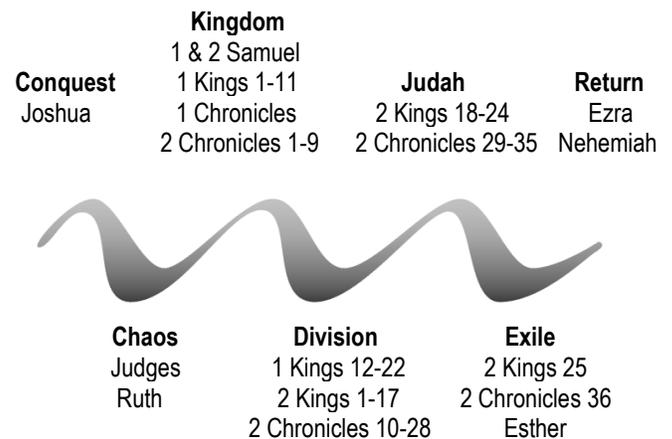
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The judges were people who used their authority to save or deliver Israel from oppression. Various forms of *judge* occur 20 times in the book of Judges; various forms of *deliver* occur 48 times.

Key Verse

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25 ESV)

Peaks and Valleys of Historical Books



Sources:

Journeying with God: A Survey of the Old Testament, Purposeful Design Publications. Wilmington, Harold L. *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*, Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1997.