

## JUDGES

- 1) – Covers a period of approximately 125-150 years, beginning c 1150 BC and lasting until Saul's coronation in 1028 BC. Was one of the lowest points in all of Israel's history. The glory of Egypt was over and the power of Syria not yet come, so the Israelites were able to develop without serious enemies who could destroy them. (JB: Is this a contradiction? See note #15) /// The Hebrew word for judge can also be translated “ruler.” /// All 12 judges were warrior rulers, although Deborah did function as a “judge” at times. /// **Construction** of the book: Most scholars agree that the book emerged through several stages of collecting, writing, and editing. 1) assemblage of tribal heroes into a connected narrative, 2) addition of editorial sections in and around the stories, 3) two-part introduction (1:1-2:5, 2:6-3:6) and a two-part conclusion (17:1-18:31, 19:1-21:25), 4) editorial shaping in the 8th century (Hezekiah), 7th (Josiah), and 6-5th (post-exile). /// Dennis Olson: “The era of the judges thus becomes a paradigm of any human institution, mode of governance, or ideology -- necessary but provisional, helpful for a time...”
- 2) 1:1 – The first chapter, up to 2:5, is confusing because of the admixture of sources. Except for 1:1, these verses describe events following Chapter 10 in Joshua: the first attacks on the central highlands after the capture of Jericho and Ai, and before the northern and southern conquests. The fact that Joshua is not mentioned in this summary (in fact, is dead, according to 1:1) may mean that he was not as important as the writer of Joshua indicated. (See note #1 in Joshua) The Israelites are encamped at Gilgal, as they were in Chap 10 of Joshua. Vss 1-21 are a collection of re-arranged and re-interpreted accounts of the conquest of Canaan from Joshua 14-19. Vss 1:1-2:5 is the first part of the two-part introduction. Vss 2:6-3:6 is the second part.
- 3) 1:8 – Contradicts 1:21, 15:63, and 2 Sam 5:6ff. It may be that Jerusalem was taken and burned early in the conquest, then lost years (decades?) later, and recaptured by David. Dennis Olson: “In Joshua 15:63, it was Judah who failed to drive out the Jebusites. In Judges, Judah does drive out the Jebusites, entrusts Jerusalem to the Benjaminites who lose control of the city. This is in line with the pro-Judah character of Judges 1.”
- 4) 1:13 – Othniel was Caleb's nephew and would later become the first judge, about two generations after Joshua's death. And Achsah is the first of many colorful women in Judges, a book that contains the stories of more interesting women than any other book in the Bible.
- 5) 1:16 – See Numbers 10:29ff where Hobab is Moses' brother-in-law, who was the son of Reuel, a Midianite. But in Judges 4:11, the story of Heber the Kenite, Jael, and Sisera, Hobab is described as being the father-in-law of Moses. (See also note in Exodus 3:1, #4) /// The “city of palms” was probably a city at the south end of the Dead Sea, not Jericho as in 3:13.
- 6) 1:18 – The Septuagint version reads, “Judah did not take” those cities. But in Joshua 15:45-47, those cities were part of Judah's inheritance.
- 7) 1:19 – The Israelites still had bronze spears, swords, etc. Iron weapons had been invented by the Hittites in 1400 BC but had not spread to desert and hill peoples like the Israelites.
- 8) 1:20 – The “sons of Anak” were the Anakim found in Canaan by the 12 spies in Numbers 13-14, descendants of the Nephilim described in Genesis 6:4, giants who discouraged the Israelites from entering kCanaan and dooming them to another 40 years in the desert.
- 9) 1:23 – In Joshua, “house of Joseph” refers to Manasseh and Ephraim (his sons), but in Chap 1

- it refers to all the northern tribes, just as Judah refers to the southern tribes. /// The entire chapter is an attempt by the writers to show how unsuccessful the northern tribes were, compared to Judah. Yet even here, God is with them in their incomplete conquests.
- 10) 2:6--3:6 The second part of the introduction, a flashback to when Joshua is alive, allows the writer to draw the contrast between the faithfulness of Joshua and his generation, and the downward slide of the subsequent generations who rebelled against the Lord. The individual judges' stories have been edited and shaped to conform to the paradigm of military, religious, and political decline -- seen clearly in the six major judges from the model Othniel to the playboy Samson. (See NIB p. 763-4 for the six standards by which a judge could be assessed.)
  - 11) 2:10-19.-- A succinct summary of the Deuteronomic conception of Israel's history: defection, oppression, prayer, deliverance. The standard formula is, "and the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." "Evil" refers to religious offenses, specifically the worship of the Caananite gods and goddesses. Baal was the weather god who struggled against Yam, the sea god, and Mot, the god of death. He overcomes both to bring rain in the spring and fertility to the people, the latter with the help of his consort Astarte (Ashtaroth).
  - 12) 2:20-23 -- "God's dream of bringing Israel into the promised land of milk and honey...has been forfeited and lost forever. The divine dream has been shattered." (Dennis Olson, NIB).
  - 13) 3:5-6 -- The proscription of marriage with foreigners was at times of crisis, such as the birth of a nation and the return of the exiles from Babylon. There are many examples of intermarriage between Israelites and non-Jews in the OT: Moses and Zipporah (Ex 2:21), Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:13), Joseph and Asenath (Gen 41:45).
  - 14) **Chapter 3:6 to the end of Judges** shows a downward religious and political spiral. Othniel sets the model for all the rest with 40 years of peace against 8 years of oppression, compared with Jephthah (6 years of peace, 18 years of oppression), and Sampson (20 vs. 40). The stories of the early major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah) spotlight military victories and God's rule, very little about their personal lives. The stories of the later judges (Gideon, Jephthah, Sampson) are primarily about their self-serving desire for personal vengeance which crowds out any military victories. This progression reveals the gradual decline in the fortunes of Israel and the judges effectiveness as leaders. /// There is also a geographical progression, beginning with Othniel from Judah in the far south and ending with Sampson from Dan in the far north. /// The king's name means "Cushite of double wickedness." His kingdom is around Haran, where Abram went from Ur.
  - 15) 3:12 -- "Eglon" in Hebrew is related to the noun "egal" which means "fatted calf." King Eglon was a very fat man.
  - 16) 3:22 -- The final phrase contains an unusual word whose meaning is uncertain. The NRSV: "The dirt came out," meaning the contents of the colon. The NIV: "The sword came out his back." Both denote a penetrating, fatal wound.
  - 17) 3:31 -- Shamgar is not a Hebrew name; may be Hurrian, etymology really not clear. Anath is the name of a female Canaanite goddess. This third judge may have been a foreign mercenary who led Israel's federation of tribes for a while.
  - 18) 4:3 -- Sisera may be a Philistine name. Haroshoth may be near Med. Sea, west of Mt. Tabor, west end of the Jezreel Plain.

- 19) 4:4 – Deborah, the fourth judge. Root of the name (DBR) means “to lead,” or “to pursue.” The same root is in Debir, king of Eglon. Bethel (“House of God”) is 15 miles north of Jerusalem. Barak (means "lightning") was a guerilla leader keeping the hopes of Israel alive. (Baraka in Swahili means “blessing.” Almost certainly a coincidence.) Kedesh in Naphtali was east of the Jordan River, north of the Sea of Galilee, up to Dan. Mt. Tabor is in the territory of Issachar, twelve miles northeast of Megiddo.
- 20) 4:11 – The Kenites were associated with iron smithing (Gen 4:22). So Heber may have separated from the clan in order to make iron chariots and weapons for King Jabin.
- 21) **Chapter 5** – This song (poem) may be contemporary with the event, and if so would be one of the oldest surviving in Hebrew literature. Many of its verses are now obscure.
- 22) 5:8a – Probably a mistranslation in both the NRSV & NIV. Should read that Deborah chose new recruits for Barak’s army. And they came without weapons!
- 23) 5:19-22 – The Canaanites’ iron chariots became useless in the water and mud of the Kishon Valley due to God’s sending heavy rains and working through the stars to defeat the Canaanites.
- 24) 5:23 – Meroz: a place or an Israelite clan, near the Kishon River, in the Jezreel Plain in northern Palestine.
- 25) 5:24-27 – Sisera seems to be sitting or standing in this scene. He falls between Jael’s legs, a sexual euphemism noted as far back as the ancient Jewish rabbinical interpreters. Sisera, used to killing men and raping women, is killed and “raped” by a woman. (Isaac Azimov: “Did Jael with a nail pierce the viscera of Sisera? No. His head. He is dead.”)
- 26) 5:30 – The Hebrew word is even more crude: “womb,” instead of “damsel” (NSRV: girl).
- 27) 5:31 – A liturgical appendage not part of the original poem.  
How to accept: 1) God as divine warrior, 2) the ruthless vengeance of Jael, 3) the desire for vengeance against one’s enemies. **Dennis Olson:** 1) God fights for the weak and powerless against arrogant forces of oppression, death and rebellion against God. 2) Jael’s murder is God working through her against arrogant greed and oppression. 3) Praying to God to take vengeance against one’s enemies allows the petitioner to let go of his/her own desire for vengeance and entrust God to perform whatever justice is needed.
- 28) 6:1-32 – Opening portrait of Gideon (5<sup>th</sup> judge) connects with three other figures: 1) Like Moses, Gideon argues with God. Moses had a miraculous staff (Ex 9:1-5), similar to the one the angel uses to light a fire on the altar. 2) The altar fire is reminiscent of that started by God in the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20ff). 3) Gideon builds an altar on the spot, like Jacob after his fight with God at Penuel (Gen 32:30).
- 29) 6:1 – Midian was one of the sons of Abraham, from Keturah (Gen 25:1-6).
- 30) 6:5 – The first documented camel raids.
- 31) 7:5 – Leaving him alert to danger while drinking? The word in Hebrew translated here as “thousand” (elep) can also be translated “tribal unit,” perhaps ten soldiers, starting then with 320; even that was a large army at that time.
- 32) 8:5-9 – Zebah and Salmunna were Midianite princes who coveted Israel’s lands (Psalms 83:11). Penuel was where Jacob had once wrestled with the angel, several miles east of Succoth on the Jabok River. Penuel means "face of God." These were probably fellow Israelites: Succoth was settled by the tribe of Gad (Josh 13:24-28). Thus begins Gideon’s descent from acting for the Lord to acting for himself. His revenge here and against the two kings is out of proportion. He may deny wanting to rule the Israelites (8:23) but he

goes on to act like their king. Then he recreates Aaron's golden calf episode by collecting gold ear rings and making a golden ephod which the people worship instead of God (8:27).

- 33) 8:16-17 – Gideon has stepped over the line. His revenge is disproportionate to the cities' inhospitality. Also, he is acting on his own with no guidance or help from God.
- 34) 9:1 – Abimilech's mother was a concubine or a slave from Shechem, giving Abimilech less status than the other 70 sons. /// Shechem was a Canaanite city. The Israelites fought them (Genesis 34). After Joshua's conquest, Shechem became a famous site for ceremonies (Joshua 24). Joshua was buried there. Rehoboam was crowned king there and ruled the southern kingdom of Judah, but later Jeroboam made Shechem the capital of the northern kingdom.
- 35) 9:8-15 – The trees and vine are the people of Shechem. The bramble is Abimilech.
- 36) 9:45 – It was not rebuilt until Jeroboam did it (1 Kings 12:25)
- 37) 11:14-28 - A rehearsal of Numbers 21, 300 years earlier. Israel must cross one of three nations to get to Canaan: Moab, Edom, or the land of the Amorites (later Ammon). The Israelites tried to cross the Amorites' land in Gilead and were attacked by them, and defeated them, and the Lord gave them Gilead. Now, Jephthah's main argument against Ammon's oppression of the Israelites is that they have allowed the Israelites to live in Gilead for 300 years, so why attack them now? Jephthah asks the Lord to decide for or against Ammon. Jephthah shows himself to be an able negotiator, hoping to settle things without war. He knows the faith traditions of Israel's past.
- 38) 11:29 – Dennis Olson argues that Jephthah's vow is an unlawful bribe of the judge, the Lord. It was also reckless and problematic in that it opens the door to all kinds of inappropriate sacrifices, including unclean animals and humans.
- 39) 11:39 – There is an alternate possibility -- that Jephthah did **not** kill his daughter, but dedicated her to a life of celibacy. In this interpretation, v. 39 is considered ambiguous. The celibacy of nuns is at least partly based on this interpretation. Handel in his oratorio *Jephtha* has an angel stay the hand of Jephthah, saying, "No vow can disannul the law of God," and instructs him to dedicate her to God, "in pure and virgin state forever."
- 40) 12:1 – An empty threat. With his daughter dead or a permanent virgin, he will have no progeny, no "house" to burn down.
- 41) 12:6 – Shibboleth is now used to mean "catchword," or any characteristic which separates a group of people from another. Means "ear of corn," while sibboleth means "flood."
- 42) 13:1 – The Philistines: Just after the time when Ramses III was fighting the Sea People (Phoenicians/Philistines) between 1200 and 1180 BC, the Philistines began to invade first the coastal plains and then the valleys leading to the central highlands of Palestine. This was partly a peaceful encroachment (trade, intermarriage, migration), and partly by armed raids. Biblical sources and archaeology are in agreement that there was an intermingling of Israelites and Philistines from 1150 to 1050. At the time of Samson there was as yet no open warfare (see 14:1-4). (Delilah was a Philistine.)
- 43) 13:15-23 – A direct allusion to the wrestling match between Jacob and the angel of God (Genesis 32:29ff).
- 44) 13:24 – Samson was the 12<sup>th</sup> judge in the book of Judges, but Samuel was actually the last – see 1 Samuel 7.
- 45) 14:18 – The answer in the form of two questions may mean there is more than a surface solution – it may have another level of meaning – perhaps the true answer is "love." And

- God who is strong and has a sweet love for the Israelites, cannot let Israel go.
- 46) 14:20 – Reflection: In this chapter, God contravenes his own laws: 1) Against marrying foreign women, 2) Against touching a corpse, 3) Against murder, 4) Against stealing.
- 47) 16:4 – Scholars disagree as to Delilah’s nationality: Israelite, Canaanite, or Philistine. She is from Sorek in Canaanite lands, near Jerusalem. (Her name means “flirtatious.”) /// Samson was feminized by having his head shaved, having to grind grain. (See Lamentations 5:13, Isaiah 7:20, Deuteronomy 21:12.)
- 48) 16:23 – Probably an agricultural god, although in "Paradise Lost," Milton portrays him as a fish god. He was the father of Baal, so originally a Mesopotamian god. In Hebrew "dag" is "fish," "dagan" is "grain."
- 49) 16:30 – The only time in the OT that God grants the death wish. Other times when he didn’t: Moses (Numbers 11:10-15), Elijah (I Kings 19:4), Jeremiah (Jer 20:17), Jonah (Jonah 4:3). Reason for this uniqueness: Samson represents the end of the line of judges, his death represents the end of the system of judges. Samson embodies Israel as a nation -- the shaved head, forced grinding (like a women slave) at the mill and binding -- all images of exile and captivity. /// Samson has been interpreted as a prefigurement of Christ: 1) special birth and the angel’s pronouncement to his mother, 2) Jesus as Nazorean, Samson as Nazirite, 3) Spirit of the Lord came on Samson several times, on Jesus in the desert temptations, 4) betrayal by his own people, 5) beating and torture, 6) outstretched arms at death, 7) destruction of the enemy at death. /// At even deeper level, the Samson story affirms God’s willingness to enter into human’s sinfulness in order to accomplish God’s purpose -- God keeps coming back.
- 50)--**The end of Chap 16** marks the end of the deuteronomic edition of Judges. The last five chapters and two stories take place sometime during the era of the judges, not necessarily after the Samson story, but before the era of the Kings. These final five chapters portray the breaking down of nearly all the 10 commandments: 1]17:3-5, 3] 17:13, 5] 17:1-2, 6] 18:27, 19, 26-29, 21:10, 7] 19:22-25, 8] 17:2, 18:21-27, 9] 20:1-7, 10] 18:27-31, 21:8-24. God allows this deterioration in religious (chapter 17-18) and social (19-21) chaos in order to institute the kings, which would also deteriorate into exile. The actions of Micah in chap 17 reflect the actions of Israel: a curse becomes a blessing, consecration to the Lord becomes idolatry, vows of offerings are only partially fulfilled, Micah tries to buy God’s favor by hiring the “right” priest.
- 51) 17:1-13 – The narrative of Israel’s degeneration into religious chaos begins with Micah (“Who is like the Lord?”). The interaction between him and his mother shows the total absence of accountability and responsibility. He tries to manipulate God for personal gain by creating an idol and hiring a priest to serve it.
- 52) 17:5 – "Ephod" has two meanings. Sometimes it's a linen apron worn by the priests during rituals in the temple. It is also a kind of instrument that the priests carried. In this vs it's probably the latter. The teraphim were probably images of household gods in human form.
- 53) **Chapter 18** – The conquest of Laish follows the holy war pattern of Joshua’s capture of Jericho and Ai and spies: divine command, gaining information about the inhabitants, march and capture. But the Lord remains uninvolved in the conquest of a secure and peaceful people. In fact, this “holy war” against Laish distorts the conquest pattern in three ways: God does not lead them, God does not aid a weaker army against terrible odds, the Danites rebuild the city of Laish and live there. The tribe of Dan is a “greedy

bully who picks on the weak and serves idols of wealth and power rather than God.” Dan was the only tribe weak enough to be drawn off its “promised land.” /// V. 30 refers to the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 (2 Kings 17).

- 54) Chap 19 – the outrage at Gibeah. Gibeah was about four miles north of Jerusalem, an Israelite watch post in a Caananite area. It was Saul's seat of power later and was not abandoned till Roman times. This story probably took place at the very beginning of the period of the judges. Probably placed here by a later writer because it seemed to fit nowhere else. Reasoning: 1) Only then did all the tribes act in unity. 2) Phinehas' father Eleazar (20:28) was contemporary with Joshua, so these events must have taken place immediately after the conquest. 3) The almost total destruction of the Benjamites had to have happened earlier because at the end of the Judges, Benjamin was strong again. (King Saul and Saul/Paul came from this tribe.) 4) The sack of Jabesh-Gilead had to be early because by the time of Saul it was flourishing again.
- 55) 19:2 – Literally the Hebrew says, “to commit adultery.”
- 56) 19:29-30 – An established ritual -- see Lev 1:6,12, 8-20; Ex 29:7; 1 Sam 11:7.
- 57) 20:4-7 – The Levite distorts the outrage: 1) the “lords” rose up against him, 2) they intended to kill him, 3) fails to mention that it was he who threw his concubine to the men, 4) claims that they raped her till she died. None of these is claimed in the narrative.
- 58) 20:28, 35 – God’s just punishment of the tribe of Benjamin for disobedience, just as the two previous battles were God’s judgment on the other tribes of Israel. This was probably two accounts of the same incident.
- 59) 21:1-21 – Mizpah was the same place where Jephthah had made his reckless vow, effectively wiping out his family name. The Israelites’ vow threatened to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin. In two bizarre raids, the “Benjaminites got brides – the massacre at Jabesh-Gilead where all but 400 virgins were killed, and the rape and kidnapping of another group of dancers at Shiloh, both far more serious crimes than if they had broken their vow not to let their women marry Benjaminites.
- 60) 21:8 – There was a marriage bond between the people of Gilead and the Benjaminites (1 Chron 7:15): Macher, son of Manasseh, married Maacah, a Benjaminite (1 Sam 11).
- 61) 21:25 – “Lingering theological questions remain at the end of the book...about the role of God in...this unholy mess...” Perhaps it is that “God has allowed Israel to experience the violent harvest of its long history of disobedience.”