

# Judges I

Introduction to Judges; the Political and Spiritual Background; Early Enemies and Leaders; Deborah and Barak; Gideon's Call and Fall; Abimelech's Tyranny (Judges 1:1–9:57)

## Who Were the Judges?

- Titles: *Sefer Shophtim* (Hebrew, "Book of Judges"), *Kritai* (Greek, "Judges")
- The word *shophēt* or "judge" only appears once, in 11:27 where it refers to the Lord
  - Only Deborah clearly adjudicates in the modern sense of the word
  - However, most of the judges are said to "rule" (*shaphat*), a word related to "judge"
    - Cf. judges in the Book of Mormon
- Rather than "judge," perhaps *moshi'a*, "deliverer" or "savior" would be better
  - Perhaps better to think of them as enforcing God's judgment, especially upon enemies
  - Frequently, but not always, enjoyed the spirit of prophecy and were divinely raised up and guided
  - Judges portrayed with all their rough edges to show the instability of Israel without a king (covenant of David a Deuteronomistic theme)
- Traditionally there were **13 between Joshua and Saul**, **11 in Judges** and **Eli and Samuel in 1 Samuel**

## Content and Dates

- **More theological narrative!**
- **Period Ostensibly covered: 410 years, assuming that the judges “ruled” sequentially**
  - In fact the book probably covers a period of approximately 150 years (c. 1200–1095 B.C., when Saul became king)
    - Numbers are perhaps fixed expressions—20, 40, and 80 years are a half generation, a generation, and two generations
  - Accepting the traditional date of the exodus in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the events in Judges would be set in 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries
- **Authorship and Date of Composition**
  - Traditionally attributed to the prophet Samuel
    - Diversity of styles and contradictions in the text suggest a collection of stories that existed independently
    - *The Song of Deborah (5:1–31) may be one of the oldest passages in the OT! (cf. Song of Moses, etc.)*
  - References to there “being no king in Israel” suggest that it was written during the monarchy
    - ***Probably collected and edited by DH<sup>1</sup> and/or DH<sup>2</sup>!***

11/10/2009

20. Judges I

3

## Theme

- **“The book of Judges was written with a clear didactic and moral intent, that is, to show, through the flow of historical events, that *obedience to Jehovah brings life and peace*, while *disobedience results in hardship, oppression, and death*.” (Parry and Ricks, packet, 70)**
  - Cf. Deuteronomy 28:25–37; 31:16, 20, and the “Nephite Prosperity Cycle” of the Book of Mormon (see Helaman 12:2–3)
- **“Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but they did not so*. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge . . . And it came to pass, *when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.*” (2:16–19)**

11/10/2009

20. Judges I

4

## Structure

- **Background of the Period of Judges (1:1–3:6)**
  - Political Background: Israel's Failure to Complete the Conquest of Canaan (1:1–36)
  - Spiritual Background (2:1–3:6)
- **History of the Period of the Judges (3:7–16:31)**
  - Mesopotamian Oppression and **Othniel's** Deliverance (3:7–11)
  - Moabite Oppression and **Ehud's** Deliverance (3:12–30)
  - [Shamgar's Victory over the Philistines (3:31)]
  - Canaanite Oppression and Deliverance by **Deborah and Barak** (4:1–5:31)
  - Midianite Oppression and **Gideon's** Deliverance (6:1–8:35)
  - **Abimelech's** Tyranny (9:1–57)
  - Tola's Judgeship (10:1–2)
  - [Jair's Judgeship (10:3–5)]
  - Ammonite Oppression and **Jephthah's** Deliverance (10:6–12:7)
    - **Intertribal Dissension** (12:1–7)
  - [Ibzan's Judgeship (12:8–10)]
  - [Elon's Judgeship (12:11–12)]
  - [Abdon's Judgeship (12:13–15)]
  - Philistine Oppression and **Samson's** Career (13:1–16:31)
- **Apostasy of the Period of the Judges (17:1–21:25)**
  - **Micah and the Migration of the Danites** (17:1–18:31)
  - **The Benjaminite War** (19:1–21:25)

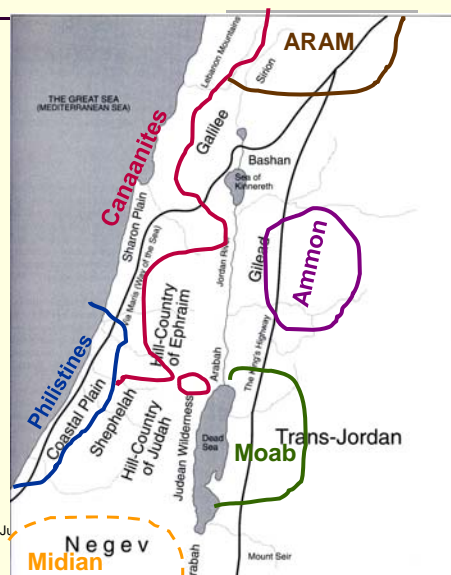
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20. Judges I

5

## Political Background

- The impression of the book of Joshua notwithstanding, *apparently the Israelites only occupied only the hill and high country*
- **Canaanites** and other peoples continued to occupy the valleys, the coastline, and important strategic sites
  - Other newcomers, the **Philistines**, had settled on the southern coast as part of a movement called "the Sea Peoples"
- Neighbors in **Aram** (Syria, apparently "Mesopotamia" in KJV), **Ammon**, and **Moab** also had designs on territory in Israel
- *Generally Israel's opponents were technologically more advanced (good at working iron, used war chariots, etc.)*



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## Breaking the Covenant and Military Failure

- **The covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel is typified by the bond between a husband and wife**
  - References to generations that “did not know” the Lord (e.g. 2:10) use covenant language
  - “And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed **my covenant** which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; **I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not**” (2:20–22)
  - The Canaanite and other nations were left to test Israel! (cf. Lamanites and Nephites)
- **“Whoring after other gods . . .”**
  - why the strong term? Note “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God . . .” (Exodus 20:5)
    - “jealous” here (Heb. *Qannā*’ has the sense of **ardor** or **the passionate bond between spouses**)

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7

## Who were the other gods?

- *Ba’alim* is plural of **Ba’al**, Canaanite for “master” or “Lord”
  - Baal was conceived of as a sky god who, among other things, brought fertility to the earth through seasonal rains
  - There was one Baal but many (each area had its own version who was somehow still Baal)
  - Frequently worshiped at outdoor sanctuaries (or “high places” or *bamot*), where he was represented by standing stones
- **Asherah** (pl. **Ashtaroth**) was Baal’s consort
  - A fertility goddess, she represented the fecund earth, agricultural productivity, and the power of procreation
  - She was often represented in cult with a wooden pillar or carved wooden statue—hence “the groves” of the KJV



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8

## High Places—Local Shrines



*This later Israelite "high place" (bahmah) at Dan in northern Israel was modeled on earlier Canaanite shrines. On a hill top it had a "horned altar" and then a few steps higher to the platform for incense and prayer*

*If the Deuteronomist was correct and Israelite worship could only take place at the Tabernacle, when the Israelites scattered, the temptation to use local worship sites would be great*

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## The Pattern of Judges Illustrated

Donald Parry, The Judges of Israel: A Fourfold Cycle (packet, 71)

Apostasy	Oppression	Repentance	Deliverance
2:11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.	2:14 And he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about.		2:16 The lord raised up judges.
3:7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.	3:8 And he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia.	3:9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.	3:9 The Lord raised up a deliverer (Othniel).
3:12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.	3:12 And the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab.	3:15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.	3:15 The Lord raised up a deliverer (Ehud).
4:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.	4:2 And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan.	4:3 And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.	4:4 (Deborah)
6:1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.	6:1 And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian.	6:7 When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.	6:13 (Gideon)
10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.	10:7 And he sold them into the hands of the Philistines/ Ammon.	10:10 And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord.	11:1 (Jephthah)
13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.	13:1 And the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines.		13:24 (Samson)

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10

## Early Enemies and Leaders

- **Chushan-Rishathaim**, king of Aram Naharaim or northwestern Mesopotamia (including Haran?) oppressed Israel 8 years
  - **Othniel**, nephew and son-in-law (!) of Caleb (3:7–11)
    - A leader of Judah, he apparently mobilized most of Israel against this external threat
    - “judged” Israel 40 years (a generation?)
- **Eglon** (“fatted calf”), obese king of Moab spoiled Israel 18 years
  - Left-handed **Ehud**, a Benjamite, stabbed Eglon and got away with the assassination (3:12–30)
    - “judged” Israel 80 years (2 generations?)
- [Philistines harassed Israel, foreshadowing future struggles]
  - [Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with an ox-goad, foreshadowing Samson’s killing a thousand with the jawbone of an ass]

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20. Judges I

11

## Deborah and Barak (4:1–5:31)

- **20-year Canaanite Oppression** and Deliverance by **Deborah and Barak**
- **The Story of Deborah and Barak (4:1–24)**
  - A prophetess! Her name means “bee” (4:5)
  - Sat under “the palm tree of Deborah” between Ramah and Bethel in Ephraim
  - Her military commander, **Barak** (“lightning”) operated in the territory of Mount Tabor, Naphtali, and Zebulun—against **Jabin of Hazor**
    - The story of **Sisera** and **Jael**, wife of Heber the Kenite
- The Song of Deborah (5:1–31)



“Jael and Sisera,” Artemisia Gentileschi about 1620

the villages ceased,  
they ceased in Israel,  
until that I Deborah arose,  
that I arose a mother in Israel.  
(5:7)

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20. Judges I

12

## Gideon's Call and Fall (6:1–8:35)



Gideon = "Destroyer,"  
"Mighty warrior" or  
"Feller (of trees)"

- **The Midianite Oppression** (6:1–10)
- **Gideon's Call** (6:11–27)
- Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal (6:28–32)
  - Known as Jerubbaal "let Baal plead" after this
- **The Sign of the Fleece** (6:33–40)
- **Gideon Surprises and Routs the Midianites** (7:1–23)
  - Giving the fearful Israelites a chance to return home reduces Gideon's force from 32,000 to 10,000
  - Drinking habits reduce it further to 300!
  - Trumpets, jars, and torches confuse the enemy
- **Gideon's Triumph and Vengeance** (7:24–8:21)
  - Victory sullied with inter-tribal squabbles
  - Punishes the inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel, fellow Israelites
- **Gideon's Idolatry** (8:22–28)
  - Rejects an offer of kingship but takes a tributes of gold, from which he makes an "ephod" (ostensibly a priestly vestment but perhaps here clothing an idol)
  - "judges" for forty years (a generation)
- Death of Gideon (8:29–35)

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20. Judges I

13

## Abimelech's Tyranny (9:1–57)

- **Abimelech, "My Father (Gideon) is King," Attempts to Establish a Monarchy (9:1–6)**
  - Slaughters all but one of his 70 brothers with the connivance of the elders of Shechem
  - Becomes "king" of the Shechem city-state
- **The Parable of the Trees (9:7–21)**
  - Jotham, Abimelech's surviving brother, shames the elders of Shechem
- **The Downfall of Abimelech (9:22–57)**
  - "judged Israel" (probably just Shechem and its environs) 3 years
  - A newcomer, Gaal, starts a failed revolt
  - **While besieging a neighboring town, an unnamed woman kills Abimelech with a millstone!**

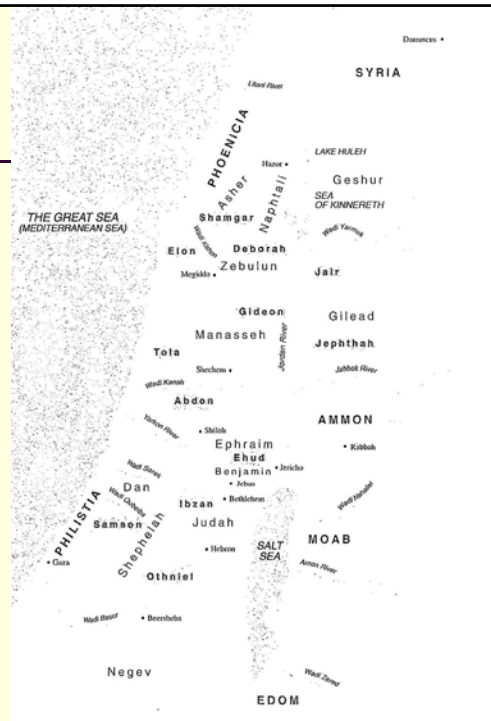
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20. Judges I

14

## Areas of Activity

- No single judge seemed to “rule” throughout all of Israel, but virtually every area of Israel had a judge at some point in the narrative



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