

BOOK OF JUDGES

CLASS NOTES

The Promised Land was predominantly in the control of Israel (Josh 21:45; 22:4, 6; 23:14; 24:13, 28). However, Joshua also indicates that the conquest was incomplete (Josh 9:14–15; 16:10; 17:12–18; 19:47; 23:7, 12–13; 24:23). Unfortunately, Judges is not the story of the completion of the conquest but rather, Israel’s failure to live according to the covenant within the land. Judges describes in excruciating detail the moral and spiritual disintegration of Israel and its inevitable consequences.¹ Were it not for Yahweh’s faithfulness to raise up “judges” periodically the situation would appear utterly hopeless. However, the ultimate solution is not to be found in the “judges” but in a king who fulfills the ideal of Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

Introductory Issues

Message

We suggest that the message of the book is, “Spiritual bankruptcy is the result of investing in the failed strategies of the world, failing to follow the sound principles of God’s law, and the absence of trustworthy leadership, yet the Lord continues to prove Himself faithful to His people.” That is, Israel became spiritually bankrupt because she failed to maintain a proper separation from the world,² failed to keep the law of the Lord,³ and lacked the godly leadership that she so desperately needed.⁴

Title

The title of the book in English, Greek (*Kritai*, LXX), and Hebrew is “Judges.” The Hebrew title שֹׁפְטִים means either judges or executive leaders.⁵ This title reflects the type of leadership reflected in the book and the central role that these “judges” play in the narrative (see 2:16). But the title can be somewhat misleading if one has in mind a modern judge who

¹ Victor Matthews observes that, “Every nation has its ‘wild’ period, a time that some would like to forget, but that was very important in the development of the people into a nation” (Victor Harold Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*, ed. Bill T. Arnold, New Cambridge Bible Commentary [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 11).

² Daniel Block refers to this as “the Canaanization of the nation of Israel” (*Judges, Ruth*, 75).

³ Charles Dyer and Eugene Merrill actually use the word anarchy in their subtitle of their chapter on Judges in Charles H. Dyer and Eugene H. Merrill, *Old Testament Explorer: Discovering the Essence, Background, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*, ed. general Charles R. Swindoll and managing ed. Roy B. Zuck, Swindoll Leadership Library (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001), 179–96.

⁴ This problem involved both consistency and continuity.

⁵ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Updated and Revised ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 274.

adjudicates trials. A more accurate title for the role of these leaders in Judges might be deliverer. Indeed Daniel Block suggests that a more apt title for the book would be “the Book of Saviors/Deliverers.”⁶

Authorship

The Book of Judges is silent regarding the identity of its author. Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Samuel (*B. Bat* 14b). There is no good reason why Samuel could not have collected the stories but there is no hard evidence to that effect. There is some evidence that the book could have been written or finalized in the period of the monarchy (see the discussion on dating).

Date

The issue of dating Judges really involves two issues: (1) the date of the events, and (2) the date of writing.

The date of the events contained in the Book of Judges is tied closely to the dating of the Exodus from Egypt because the events of Judges follow this event. Since we have already concluded that the Exodus from Egypt occurred in 1446 B.C. and that the conquest described in Joshua followed after the forty year period of Israel’s wanderings in the Wilderness (1406). If the conquest lasted approximately seven years and the period of the Judges follows the conquest then a fourteenth century start date would seem likely. More precisely, the period of the judges is generally understood to encompass the period between the death of Joshua to the beginning of Saul’s reign (1051 B.C.). There is some difficulty in fitting the chronological data in Judges within this period, but if one allows for some overlapping between Judges then the problem is alleviated somewhat.

Judges

DATE
Chronological Problem

According to 1 Kings 6:1 there were 480 years between the Exodus and the 4th year of Solomon’s reign.

The combined years of the judges =	410 years
The years of wilderness wandering =	40
The years of Saul’s reign (Acts 13:21) =	40
The years for David’s reign (2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:11) =	40
The first 4 years of Solomon’s reign (1 Kgs 6:1) =	4
The total =	534 years

Exceeds 480 years (1 Kgs 6:1) even without adding in the period of the conquest (1406-1399) and the period of Joshua’s rule and the rule of the elders (Josh 24:31; Judg 2:7)

⁶ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 23.

Proposed Chronological Solution	
	40 years in the wilderness
+	16 (?) years for Joshua's and elders leadership
	335 years PERIOD OF JUDGES (overlapping rule)
+	5 (?) years between Samson and Saul
+	40 years for Saul's reign (Acts 13:21)
+	40 years for David's reign (2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:11)
+	4 years for Solomon's first four years of reigning
=	480 years

The dating of the writing/compiling of the book is not explicitly identified. However, certain statements in the book suggest a date of writing during the period of the monarchy. For example, the expression “in those days Israel had no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) would seem to suggest a date after the establishment of the monarchy. The reference to Canaanites in Gezer might suggest a date before the Egyptians conquered the city, eventually giving the city as a gift to Solomon as a wedding gift (1 Kgs 9:16). Other chronological evidence includes the reference to Jebusite control of Jerusalem (1:21) which would indicate a time before David's capture of the city around 1000 B.C. (2 Sam 5:6–10, but see 24:16). There is even some evidence that can be understood to point to a period after David's reign (1011–971 B.C.). For example, some see the condition of Israel in Judges 17–21 reflecting a time after the Davidic dynasty had been established and the reference to “captivity” in 18:30 as a reference to the Assyrian or Babylonian captivities. But as Archer demonstrates, this data can be understood in other ways.⁷ In the end, it seems that dogmatism is unwarranted and that positing a date of writing sometime during the period of the monarchy is the most that the available evidence allows.

Original Audience

The original recipients of Judges are not explicitly identified and the issue is closely related to authorship. If written during the period of the monarchy as we have suggested, then presumably, it was originally written for the Israelites during this period.

Historical Setting

The Book of Judges is concerned with the period from the death of Joshua (1:1) to the beginning of the monarchy with Saul, a period of about three hundred years. A working date would be 1380–1045 B.C. This period would correspond to the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age. The Book of Joshua had ended on a fairly optimistic note. The Promised Land was predominantly in the control of Israel (Josh 21:45; 22:4, 6; 23:14; 24:13, 28). However, Joshua also indicates that the conquest was incomplete (Josh 9:14–15; 16:10; 17:12–18; 19:47; 23:7, 12–13; 24:23). Judges is not the story of the completion of the conquest, but rather, Israel's failure to live according to the covenant within the land.

⁷ Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 275–6.

Violent Deaths of Israelites in Judges		
The violently Killed	The Perpetrator	Reference
70 sons of Jerubbaal	Abimelech	9:5
Abimelech	A woman	9:53
Jephthah's daughter	Jephthah	11:39
42,000 Ephraimites	Jephthah	12:6
Samson	Samson	16:30
40,030 Israelites	Benjaminites	20:21, 25, 31
25,000 Benjaminites	Israelites	20:46
Men, women, children from Jabesh-Gilead	Israelites	21:10-11

The internal disintegration of Israel is not her only threat. Both Canaanites within (Jabin, Philistines) and nations outside the land (e.g., Moab, Midian, Ammon) threatened Israel. The major powers in the region (Egypt and the Hittites) apparently played a minor role in relation to Israel during this period. The Egyptians and Hittites were locked in a power struggle and appear to be more concerned with the valuable coastal trade routes which were not controlled by Israel, but rather the Philistines.

Points of Pressure on Israel⁸			
Enemy	Deliverer	Tribal supporters	Locus of Pressure
Moab	Ehud	Benjamites	Heartland
Philistine	Shamgar		Southwest
Canaanites		Ephraim, Zebulun, Naphtali, Issachar	North
Midian	Gideon	Manasseh, Ephraim	Heartland
Ammonites	Jephthah	Gileadites	Transjordan
Philistines	Samson	Dan	Southwest

Themes

There are several key themes in Judges: (1) Israel “doing evil” (עָוָה; 13x, 2:11; 3:7, 12[2x]; 4:1; 6:1, 29; 7:13, 14, 22; 10:6, 18, 13:1); (2) The role of women in Judges as both heroines and victims; (3) the prominent role of the angel of the Lord (59x in OT, 18x in Judges); and (4) that there was no king in Israel and thus spiritual anarchy reigned.⁹

⁸ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 62.

⁹ The Meaning of the Phrase “In those days Israel had no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) has been variously understood. Some understand the phrase in the sense that the king is the same as judge and thus this is merely a matter-of-fact statement that there was no judge during that particular time (Talmon). Others see it as a pro monarchy or pro-Davidic statement showing why human kings were necessary. Block takes an interesting approach in arguing that the statement is rhetorical, namely, Israel does not need a king to stray into sin, they can do so all by themselves. Another option is to see the King as divine King, that is God, and Israel is acting like they have no

Purpose

The Book of Judges was written for three reasons. First, Judges was written to show the consequences for breaking covenant with Yahweh. Second, the book was written to defend Yahweh's honor by showing that Israel's failures were not His fault. Indeed, one could argue as William Dumbrell does that, Judges was written to show the sovereign grace of God in preserving Israel in spite of Israel.¹⁰ The Lord had not failed to keep His promises (Josh 21:45). Third, Judges was written to look forward to a righteous king to lead the nation to God.¹¹

Structure

It is generally recognized that Judges can be divided into three major sections: (1) a prologue (1:1–3:6), (2) a central body containing stories of individual judges (3:7–16:31), and (3) an epilogue (17:1–21:25).

Analytical Outline¹²

- I. In those days there was no Joshua in Israel: the review for Israel's failure (1:1–3:6).
 - A. The Israelites failed to complete the conquest (1:1–36).
 1. Judah partially conquers southern Canaan (1:1–20).
 2. Benjamin failed to drive out the Jebusites (1:21).
 3. The house of Joseph failed to drive out the Canaanites in central Canaan (1:22–29).
 4. Zebulun failed to drive out the inhabitants of Kitron and Nahalol (1:30).
 5. Asher failed to drive out the inhabitants of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob (1:31–32).
 6. Naphtali failed to drive out the inhabitants of Beth–shemesh, Beth–anath

King/God. Finally, it could be that the phrase is a pro monarchy statement, but in an idealized sense. The king needed would be one would fulfill the ideals envisioned in Deuteronomy 17:14–20. In one sense, David fulfills the ideal, but his failures point to an even greater king. In this sense this is “backdoor Messianism” which points to Jesus Christ (see Robert Chisholm's forthcoming commentary on Judges).

¹⁰ William Dumbrell, “‘In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes.’ The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983):30–1.

¹¹ Some interpreters have suggested that Judges was written as an apologetic for the monarchy. That is, it was written to show why Israel needed a king to rule over them. While the statement “in those days Israel had no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) can certainly be understood that way, Israel's subsequent history with the monarchy in place suggests that a having a king was not a fail-proof solution. Even King David's record was spotty. Another approach is to understand the king here as King, i.e. Yahweh. This contention appears to be supported by 1 Samuel 8:7. However, although the word king is used extensively in Judges it is not used explicitly of Yahweh. A better explanation actually combines elements from both explanations. That is, Judges does indeed emphasize a need for a king, but this king would not be an ordinary king. This king would be an ideal king, a divine king, Jesus Christ.

¹² This outline is highly indebted to the work of Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 99.

- (1:33).
7. Dan failed to drive out the Amorites in northern Canaan (1:34–36).
- B. The Israelites failed to keep the covenant (2:1–3:6).
1. The angel of the Lord announces Israel’s covenantal failure and the consequences of the failure (2:1–5).
 - a. Israel’s covenantal failure is announced (2:1–2).
 - b. The consequences of Israel’s failure is announced (2:3)
 - c. The Israelites respond to the announcement (2:4–5).
 2. The death of Joshua and his generation leaves behind an unbelieving generation (2:7–10).
 3. The pattern of Israel’s covenantal failure is described (2:11–19).
 4. The consequences for covenantal Israel’s failure is described (2:20–3:6).
 - a. The Lord in His anger will test Israel (2:20–23).
 - b. The nations that will test Israel are identified (3:1–6).
- II. In those days there were Judges in Israel: the repetition of Israel’s failure (3:7–16:31).
- A. Othniel defeats Cishan–rishathaim, king of Aram–Naharaim (3:7–12).
- B. Ehud defeats Eglon, king of Moab (3:13–30).
- C. Shamgar defeats the Philistines (3:31).
- D. Deborah (and Barak) defeat Jabin, king of Canaan (4:1–5:31).
1. The victory described in prose (4:1–24)
 2. The victory described in poetry—the Song of Deborah (5:1–31).
- E. Gideon defeats the Midianites (6:1–9:57).
1. Israel sins, God punishes, and Israel is delivered through Gideon (6:1–8:3).
 2. Gideon completes his victory and disciplines those who did not aid in the victory (8:4–21).
 3. Gideon “rules” Israel and Midian is subdued (8:22–28).
 4. Gideon leaves a mixed legacy (8:29–35).
 5. Gideon’s illegitimate son Abimelech rules over Israel (9:1–57).
- F. Tola and Jair judged Israel (10:1–5).
- G. Jephthah defeats the Ammonites (10:6–12:7).
1. Israel sins and the Ammonites are sent to oppress Israel (10:6–16).
 2. Ammonite oppression leads the Gileadites to call upon Jephthah to lead them (10:17–11:11).
 3. Jephthah attempts unsuccessfully to negotiate Israel’s territorial case (11:12–28).
 4. Jephthah makes a rash vow for victory over Ammon and then defeats Ammon (11:29–33).
 5. Jephthah fulfills his vow (11:34–40).
 6. Jephthah defeats Ephraim and dies (12:1–7).
- H. Ibzan judged Israel for seven years (12:8–10).
- I. Elon judged Israel for ten years (12:11–12).
- J. Abdon judged Israel for eight years (12:13–15).
- K. Samson delivers Israel (temporarily) from the Philistines (13:1–16:31).
1. The angel of Yahweh announces the birth of Samson (13:1–14).
 2. Manoah responds to the angel of Yahweh (13:15–23).

3. Samson is born and the Spirit of Yahweh begins working in his life (13:24–25).
 4. Samson gets engaged to a Philistine woman (14:1–9).
 5. Samson’s marriage feast is ruined by a riddle (14:10–20).
 6. Samson takes revenge for the loss of his wife (15:1–8).
 7. Samson defeats the Philistines at Lehi (15:9–20).
 8. Samson takes the city gates of Gaza (16:1–3).
 9. Samson meets Delilah and she betrays him (16:4–20).
 10. Samson is captured and abused (16:21–22).
 11. Samson’s last victory over the Philistines at the feast of Dagon (16:23–31).
- III. In those days there was no king in Israel: the results of Israel’s failure (17:1–21:25).
- A. A lack of leadership led to religious and societal failure (17:1–18:31).
 1. The religious failure of Israel is exemplified by Micah the Ephraimite privatization of religion and idolatry (17:1–13).
 2. The social failure of Israel is exemplified by the Danites’ departure from their tribal allotment and subsequent idolatry (18:1–31).
 - B. A lack of leadership led to moral and societal failure (19:1–21:25).
 1. The moral failure of Israel is exemplified by the rape of the Levite’s concubine (19:1–30).
 2. The societal failure of Israel is exemplified by the war against the tribe of Benjamin (20:1–48).
 3. The moral failure of Israel is exemplified by the preservation of the tribe of Benjamin (21:1–24).
 4. A summary of religious, moral, and societal failures of Israel during the period of the Judges (21:25).

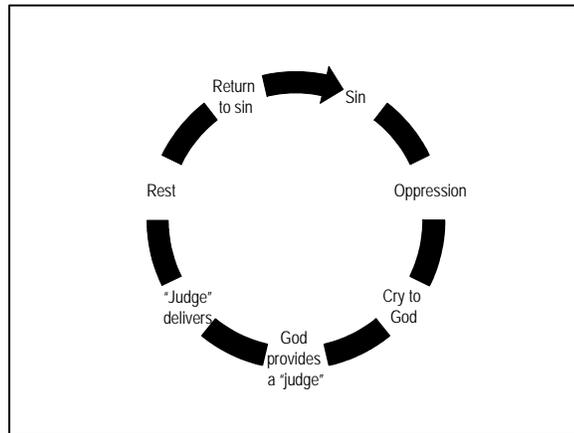
Exposition

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- 1. The angel of the Lord announces Israel’s covenantal failure and the consequences of the failure (2:1–5).
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- 2. The death of Joshua and his generation leaves behind an unbelieving generation (2:7–10).
- 3. The pattern of Israel’s covenantal failure is described (2:11–19).



- 4. The consequences for covenantal Israel’s failure is described (2:20–3:6).
 - a. The Lord in His anger will test Israel (2:20–23).
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II. In those days there were Judges in Israel: the repetition of Israel’s failure (3:7–16:31).

Judge	Tribe	Oppressor	Years of Conflict	Years of Rest	Interesting Characteristic(s)	Reference in Judges
Othniel	Judah	Mesopotamia	8	40	Son-in-law of Caleb	3:7–11

Ehud	Benjamin	Moabites	18	80	Left handed	3:12–30; 4:1
Shamgar	???	Moabites	???	10	Used an ox goad	3:31
Deborah	Ephraim	Canaanites	20	40	Prophetess	4:2–5:31
Gideon	Manasseh	Midianites	7	40	New name	6:1–8:35
Abimelech	Manasseh?				Self-appointed	9:1–57
Tola	Issachar	???	???	23		10:1–2
Jair	Gilead?	???	???	22		10:3–6
Jephthah	Gilead?	Ammonites	18	6	Hasty vow	10:7–12:7
Ibzan	Judah	???	???	8	Had 30 sons, and 30 daughters whom he intermarried outside the clan	12:8–10
Elon	Zebulun	???	???	10		12:11–12
Abdon	Ephraim	???	???	7	Had 40 sons and 30 grandsons who rode on 70 donkeys	12:13–15
Samson	Dan	Philistines	40	20	Nazarite	13:1–16:31

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- E. Gideon defeats the Midianites (6:1–9:57).
 1. Israel sins, God punishes, and Israel is delivered through Gideon (6:1–8:3).
 - a. Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh (6:1a).
 - b. Yahweh gives Israel into the hands of the Midianites to oppress them (6:1b–6a).
 - c. Israel cries out to Yahweh (6:6b).
 - d. Yahweh appoints Gideon to deliver (6:7–40).

A Comparison of Moses' and Gideon's Calls ¹³		
	Moses	Gideon
1. divine confrontation	Exod 3:1-4a	Judg 6:11-12a
2. an introductory word	Exod 3:4b-9	Judg 6:12b-13
3. commission	Exod 3:10	Judg 6:14
4. objection	Exod 3:11	Judg 6:15
5. reassurance	Exod 3:12a	Judg 6:16
6. a sign	Exod 3:12b	Judg 6:17

- e. Yahweh delivers Israel through Gideon (7:1-8:3).
 - 2. Gideon completes his victory and disciplines those who did not aid in the victory (8:4-21).
 - 3. Gideon "rules" Israel and Midian is subdued (8:22-28).
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 - 5. Jephthah fulfills his vow (11:34-40).
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- H. Ibzan judged Israel for seven years (12:8-10).

¹³ Modified from Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 130.

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 - 4. Samson gets engaged to a Philistine woman (14:1–9).
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 - 7. Samson defeats the Philistines at Lehi (15:9–20).
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 - 11. Samson’s last victory over the Philistines at the feast of Dagon (16:23–31).

Samson’s Prayer¹⁴

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An introductory formula provided by the narrator (“then Samson called to/on the Lord and said”) 2. An address/invocation (“Lord God . . . o God”) 3. A petition (“Remember me and strengthen me only this once.”) 4. A motivation (“so that with this one act of revenge I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes”) |
|---|

- III. In those days there was no king in Israel: the results of Israel’s failure (17:1–21:25).
 - A. A lack of leadership led to religious and societal failure (17:1–18:31).

¹⁴ Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books*, 161–2.

1. The religious failure of Israel is exemplified by Micah the Ephraimite privatization of religion and idolatry (17:1–13).
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