

# Summary of Judges

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## **SUMMARY**

The book of Judges presents the story of the individual tribes that became Israel from the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel. Its title comes from the individuals called by God to be “judges” (charismatic leaders) of Israel, delivering the people from the oppression of neighboring peoples and leading them in faithful obedience to the Lord. Within the framework of Deuteronomistic history. This history refers to the narrative found in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. This narrative written in the age of Israel exile mid-6th century BCE recounts Israel’s history prior to the exile; Judges illustrates the dire consequences of the lack of faithful leadership and paves the way for the discussion of monarchy in the books of Samuel the judge who anointed the first 2 kings of Israel and Kings.

## **SO WHAT?**

Judges make it noticeably clear that everything depends upon faithful obedience to the Lord. At the same time, we see God repeatedly offering the people a fresh start. This tension between God’s justice and God’s mercy. Mercy is a term used to describe leniency or compassion God’s mercy is frequently referred to or invoked in both the Old and New Testaments will continue throughout the Deuteronomistic History and the rest of the Old Testament. Contemporary Christians live within this tension as well.

## **WHERE DO I FIND IT?**

Judges is the seventh book of the Old Testament. It follows Joshua, the successor of Moses Joshua who led the Israelites in Canaan and proceeds Ruth the great grandmother of David.

## **WHO WROTE IT?**

Jewish tradition identifies Samuel as the author of Judges, but there is no evidence to support this claim. Various older traditions have been gathered together and edited by the writers of Deuteronomistic History.

## **WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?**

Judges contains some of the oldest material in the Bible. The “Song of Deborah” (Judges 5) may be as old as 1125 B.C.E., based upon the archaeological evidence of the destruction of Taanach and Megiddo; however, the refrains of the narrator, “In those days there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), and mention of the captivity of Israel (18:30) and the destruction of Shiloh (18:31) indicate a much later time. Thus, Judges contains incredibly old traditional material as well as later theological reflection and came together over a period of several centuries with a final editing in the seventh or sixth century B.C.E.

## **WHAT’S IT ABOUT?**

The book of Judges is a Deuteronomic interpretation of Israel’s history from the death of Joshua up to the birth of Samuel that displays their need for a centralized government.

## **HOW DO I READ IT?**

Judges is a collection of older stories about tribal heroes that has been structured around a recurrent formula of apostasy, oppression, and deliverance. As this formula deteriorates, we are meant to see Israel’s ever-worsening decline. The editorial comment with which the book closes, “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (21:25; compare 17:6; 18:1; 19:1), lifts up Israel’s failure to deal with external enemies and internal dissention. The book is thus a theological exposé of that failure and a rationale for the centralized government of the monarchy.

# Outline of Judges

## 1. Introduction (Judges 1:1–3:6)

Judges begins with a double introduction lifting up the political problem of an incomplete “conquest” of the land of Canaan (1:1–36) and the religious problem of the people’s recurrent apostasy (2:1–3:6).

### A. The Political Problem (Judges 1:1–36)

The conquest of Canaan is presented as a gradual process with victories (1:1–26) and defeats (1:27–36) by various tribes. This is at some odds with the book of Joshua, which envisions a unified, successful conquest under the leadership of Joshua.

### B. The Theological Problem (Judges 2:1–3:6)

This second introduction seeks to explain the defeats in Judges 1 22:36, as the result of a cyclical pattern: Israel’s apostasy (2:11–12), followed by oppression by the enemy (2:13–15), and God’s deliverance by means of a “judge” (2:16). The repetition of this pattern will structure the rest of the book.

## 2. Stories of the Judges (Judges 3:7–16:31)

The exploits of local charismatic heroes are collected to portray the downward spiral of the people due to their apostasy.

### A. Othniel versus Cushan-rishathaim (Judges 3:7–11)

This first judge, from the tribe of Judah. Judah was the name of Jacob’s fourth son and one of the 12 tribes, exemplifies the cyclical pattern with little extra detail.

## **B. Ehud versus the Moabites (Judges 3:12–30)**

Ehud, a Benjaminite, and left-handed, tricks and defeats the Moabite king, Eglon.

## **C. Shamgar versus the Philistines (Judges 3:31)**

Shamgar is not assigned to a tribe, interrupts the story, fails to follow the cyclical pattern, and has a non-Semitic name. He may be included because he brings the number of judges to twelve, symbolic of the twelve tribes.

## **D. Deborah an Israelite prophetess and influential judge. Barak against the Canaanites (Judges 4:1–5:31)**

Chapter four is a narrative account of the exploits of the Naphthalizes Deborah and Barak, at Esdraelon, while chapter five, the oldest biblical material we have, is a poetic version of the same story. Deborah is treated here as a prophet rather than a judge.

## **E. Gideon judge whose small force won a victory using jars torches and trumpets against the Midianites (Judges 6:1–8:35)**

Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh, is raised up to deliver Israel from the Midianites but becomes a harbinger of the decline to come.

## **F. Abimelech, Gideon's Son (Judges 9:1–57)**

Abimelech tries to become king of Shechem but fails. Jotham's fable (9:7–15) illustrates the ambiguity concerning kings in the book of Judges.

## **G. Tola and Jair, Minor Judges (Judges 10:1–5)**

Scant information is given about these minor judges from Issachar. Issachar was named of a son of Jacob and one of the tribes of Israel Manasseh in Transjordan.

**H. Jephthah** was a **Judge** who sacrificed his daughter to keep a vow against the Amorites. Judges 10:6 – 12: 7 The tragic story of Jephthah from Manasseh in Trans Jordan, culminates in his rash vow. A vow is a promise or an oath. God promised to be Israel's God while in return the people vowed to be obedient to God's commandments. In the book of 1st Samuel Hannah, the mother of Samuel, vowed to dedicate the life of her son resulting in the sacrifice. Sacrifice is commonly understood as the practice of offering or giving up something as a sign of worship commitment or obedience. In the Old Testament grain wine or animals are used in sacrifice. In some New Testament writings Jesus's death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice.

### **I. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, Minor Judges (Judges 12:8-15)**

Another brief group of minor judges from Zebulun the name of the son of Jacob and one of the tribes of Israel and, in Abdon's case, Ephraim is listed.

### **J. Samson a judge noted for great physical strength against the Philistines (Judges 13:1-16:31)**

Samson, from the tribe of Dan, is unlike the other judges whom God raised up to deliver the people from oppression. Samson is, rather, a "hero" (or antihero) who exercises a personal vendetta against his opponents.

## **3. Two Supplements (Judges 17:1-21:25)**

Judges closes with two appalling incidents that illustrate the anarchy that characterized the people when "there was no king in Israel, and all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (17:6; 21:25).

**A. The Origin of the Sanctuary. The sanctuary is the consecrated area around the altar of a church or temple it also means a place of safety where one can flee for**

## **protection the Old Testament especially in the psalms God is referred to as the sanctuary of refuge (Judges 17:1–18:31)**

The migration of part of the tribe of Dan to the north is recounted through the story of the Danites' theft of Micah's idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of something other than the true God an idol may be a cult image an idea on object made of water stone oh of the 10 commandments especially prohibits the worship of graven images or idols this concern is to account for the establishments of the sanctuary at Dan.

### **B. Civil War (Judges 19:1–21:25)**

Outrage at the rape and murder of a Levite's concubine erupts into the near elimination of the tribe of Benjamin by the other tribes. Both these supplements illustrate the truth of the refrain "There was no king in Israel" ([Judges 17:6](#); [18:1](#); [19:1](#); [21:25](#)) and the depth of Israel's degradation without a leader. As such, they prepare the way for the books of Samuel the judge who anointed the first 2 kings of Israel.