

OUR GOD'S FAILURES & FAITHFULNESS

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Part 1 — “An Introduction to the Book of Judges” — May 4, 2025

Introduction: On People & Their Leaders

“There is much in Judges to sadden the heart of the reader; perhaps no book in the Bible witnesses so clearly to our human frailty. But there are also unmistakable signs of the divine compassion and longsuffering...As the lives of these lesser-saviours are considered, there may be a realization of the need in modern times for a greater Saviour, of unblemished life, who is able to effect perfect deliverance, not only in time but for eternity.” —Arthur E. Cundall

Main Point: The book of Judges demonstrates through the history of Israel that God’s saving _____ and covenant _____ are more than enough to overcome our weaknesses and failures.

Title, Date, & Authorship

1. The title of the book is taken from the term that is used to describe important figures in the book.

“Judges”—Heb. *Shophetim*, Gk. *Kritai*, Lat. *Liber Iudicum*

- The judges served as both _____ and _____ leaders of God’s people (“_____”)
“...in view here may be something more akin to “decision maker,” a role made possible by the endowment of the divine Spirit and at times even prophetic access or ability...It is possible that as chief military leader, the “deliverer” was responsible for dispensing justice, much as the king was during the monarchical period.” —Mark J. Boda & Mary L. Conway

2. The book was likely the work of a single unnamed author in the 11th c. BC who used multiple preexisting sources.

Samuel? — The Jewish Talmud identifies Samuel as the author. This is certainly possible, but the book seems to be an argument for necessity of a king (Judges 18:1; 21:5) while Samuel’s farewell speech seems to be against human kingship in Israel (1 Sam. 12:12-14).

A Royal Scribe? — The author seems to be writing in a time of stability after the events of the book. The reference to the Jebusites (1:21) being in Jerusalem “to this day” seems to indicate it was written before David’s capture of the city, possibly during the reign of Saul or early in the reign of David.

“The canonical version of Judges was likely completed some time after the monarchy began...The accounts of the individual judges likely developed as they happened, moving from oral to fixed literary forms. These narratives, due to their similar subject matter, would have been gathered by official historians.” —Michael J. Glodo

Background & Structure

1. The placement of Judges in both the English and Hebrew bibles is worth noting.

The 2nd of the Historical Books (Eng.) →

The 2nd of the Former Prophets (Heb.) →

2. The book conveys the history of Israel from the initial _____ of Canaan to the rise of the _____.

- * Although the overall time period described in Judges spans roughly 410-490 years in total, many of the figures in the book had overlapping judgeships.
- * The total time period of the Judges spanned roughly _____ years. This is based on the fact that Israel is mentioned as having been in the land that long in the account of Jephthah (12:26) who likely judged a portion of the land at the same time that Samson was judging another region.

3. The book has a clear narrative structure that supports the author’s overall _____.

Prologue (1:1-3:6)—The focus is on tribal identity and military action while introducing the cycle of religious apostasy, judgment, and deliverance. A figure is introduced who stands as the ideal judge against which all others are measured.

Individual Accounts of the Judges (3:7-16:31)—A set of twelve sections which demonstrate a progressive deterioration of the leadership within the nation and at the center of which is a royal figure that is essentially an anti-judge.

Epilogue (17:1-21:25)—The focus returns to the tribes, but their conflict is no longer with other nations but is with one another. Because of their apostasy, the nation comes to resemble and even surpass the evil of the surrounding nations.

“In Judges this proclamation indicts the people of Israel...Yet [it] also proclaims the Lord as Israel’s longsuffering and powerful deliverer who raised up judges to relieve the oppression of his people.” —Michael J. Glodo

Key Themes

1. The _____ and _____ of God's people on both an individual and collective level.
 - The people collectively failed to complete the conquest which the Lord had commanded (1:19-36) and so He proclaimed to them the consequences of their lack of faith and obedience (2:1-3).
 - (1) Apostasy & Assimilation (2:11-13; 3:6)
 - (2) Enemy Oppression (2:14-15)
 - The progressive decline in the character of the people is echoed in the actions of the judges raised up to lead them.
 - ⇒ Ehud was used of the Lord to defeat Israel's enemies, but in a morally ambiguous way (3:20-21)
 - ⇒ Barak evidences cowardice and a lack of faith (4:8b) but leads the people to victory.
 - ⇒ Gideon begins his career well but ultimately leads the people into idol worship (8:27)
 - ⇒ Abimelech brought destruction on Israel rather than her enemies (9:5,49-50), "reigning" selfishly over the people as a false king (9:22).
 - ⇒ Jephthah, having defeated Israel's enemies, treated the Lord like a pagan deity with his rash vow and likely sacrifice of his daughter (11:30-31,39).
 - ⇒ Samson, despite being set apart as a Nazarite, married a Philistine (14:1-3) and engaged in open immorality (16:1), yet he was used to bring destruction upon Israel's enemies.
 - By the end of the book, Israel has become "Canaanized," being as or more corrupt morally than the surrounding nations.
 - (1) Idolatry & Religious Confusion (17:3, 5-6, 18:30-31)
 - (2) Corruption of the Levites (17:9-11; 18:19-20; 19:1)
 - (3) Moral Depravity & Civil War (19:22, 25-26; 20:12-13, 19-20)
2. The faithfulness of God both to _____ and _____ His people.
 - The Lord permitted their oppression for His purposes, yet always answered His people's prayers for help.
Judges 2:16, 20-23; 3:1-2,9,15
 - The Lord continually raised up leaders for the people and empowered them with His _____.
Judges 2:16,18; 3:9-10; 6:34; 14:19
3. The importance of God-ordained, Spirit-empowered _____ for the long-term good of God's people.
 - ⇒ The failure of the people know and obey the Word of the Lord demonstrated the need for faithful _____.
 - ⇒ The idolatrous worship of the people demonstrated the need for faithful _____.
 - ⇒ The cultural assimilation and threats from their enemies demonstrated the need for faithful _____.
Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

Key Point: The book of Judges serves as a serious _____ to us as God's people while also offering us great _____ that our God will never leave or forsake us.

Concluding Thought

- The people and events of the book of Judges are to be viewed through the lens of the book of _____.
The hope for a prophet like Moses but even greater than him!

The hope for a priesthood greater than the one he ordained!

The hope for a king greater than even Moses envisioned!

OUR GOD'S FAILURES & FAITHFULNESS

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Part 1 — “An Introduction to the Book of Judges” — May 4, 2025

Introduction: On People & Their Leaders

“There is much in Judges to sadden the heart of the reader; perhaps no book in the Bible witnesses so clearly to our human frailty. But there are also unmistakable signs of the divine compassion and longsuffering...As the lives of these lesser-saviours are considered, there may be a realization of the need in modern times for a greater Saviour, of unblemished life, who is able to effect perfect deliverance, not only in time but for eternity.” —Arthur E. Cundall

Main Point: The book of Judges demonstrates through the history of Israel that God’s saving power and covenant faithfulness are more than enough to overcome our weaknesses and failures.

Title, Date, & Authorship

1. The title of the book is taken from the term that is used to describe important figures in the book.

“Judges”—Heb. *Shophetim*, Gk. *Kritai*, Lat. *Liber Iudicum*

- The judges served as both military and political leaders of God’s people (“warlords”)

“...in view here may be something more akin to “decision maker,” a role made possible by the endowment of the divine Spirit and at times even prophetic access or ability...It is possible that as chief military leader, the “deliverer” was responsible for dispensing justice, much as the king was during the monarchical period.” —Mark J. Boda & Mary L. Conway

2. The book was likely the work of a single unnamed author in the 11th c. BC who used multiple preexisting sources.

Samuel? — The Jewish Talmud identifies Samuel as the author. This is certainly possible, but the book seems to be an argument for necessity of a king (Judges 18:1; 21:5) while Samuel’s farewell speech seems to be against human kingship in Israel (1 Sam. 12:12-14).

A Royal Scribe? — The author seems to be writing in a time of stability after the events of the book. The reference to the Jebusites (1:21) being in Jerusalem “to this day” seems to indicate it was written before David’s capture of the city, possibly during the reign of Saul or early in the reign of David.

“The canonical version of Judges was likely completed some time after the monarchy began...The accounts of the individual judges likely developed as they happened, moving from oral to fixed literary forms. These narratives, due to their similar subject matter, would have been gathered by official historians.” —Michael J. Glodo

Background & Structure

1. The placement of Judges in both the English and Hebrew bibles is worth noting.

The 2nd of the Historical Books (Eng.) →

The 2nd of the Former Prophets (Heb.) →

2. The book conveys the history of Israel from the initial conquest of Canaan to the rise of the monarchy.

* Although the overall time period described in Judges spans roughly 410-490 years in total, many of the figures in the book had overlapping judgeships.

* The total time period of the Judges spanned roughly **300** years. This is based on the fact that Israel is mentioned as having been in the land that long in the account of Jephthah (12:26) who likely judged a portion of the land at the same time that Samson was judging another region.

3. The book has a clear narrative structure that supports the author’s overall message of the book.

Prologue (1:1-3:6)—The focus is on tribal identity and military action while introducing the cycle of religious apostasy, judgment, and deliverance. A figure is introduced who stands as the ideal judge against which all others are measured.

Individual Accounts of the Judges (3:7-16:31)—A set of twelve sections which demonstrate a progressive deterioration of the leadership within the nation and at the center of which is a royal figure that is essentially an anti-judge.

Epilogue (17:1-21:25)—The focus returns to the tribes, but their conflict is no longer with other nations but with one another. Because of their apostasy, the nation comes to resemble and even surpass the evil of the surrounding nations.

“In Judges this proclamation indicts the people of Israel...Yet [it] also proclaims the Lord as Israel’s longsuffering and powerful deliverer who raised up judges to relieve the oppression of his people.” —Michael J. Glodo

Key Themes

1. The sin and disobedience of God's people on both an individual and collective level.
 - The people collectively failed to complete the conquest which the Lord had commanded (1:19-36) and so He proclaimed to them the consequences of their lack of faith and obedience (2:1-3).
 - (1) Apostasy & Assimilation (2:11-13; 3:6)
 - (2) Enemy Oppression (2:14-15)
 - The progressive decline in the character of the people is echoed in the actions of the judges raised up to lead them.
 - ⇒ Ehud was used of the Lord to defeat Israel's enemies, but in a morally ambiguous way (3:20-21)
 - ⇒ Barak evidences cowardice and a lack of faith (4:8b) but leads the people to victory.
 - ⇒ Gideon begins his career well but ultimately leads the people into idol worship (8:27)
 - ⇒ Abimelech brought destruction on Israel rather than her enemies (9:5,49-50), "reigning" selfishly over the people as a false king (9:22).
 - ⇒ Jephthah, having defeated Israel's enemies, treated the Lord like a pagan deity with his rash vow and likely sacrifice of his daughter (11:30-31,39).
 - ⇒ Samson, despite being set apart as a Nazarite, married a Philistine (14:1-3) and engaged in open immorality (16:1), yet he was used to bring destruction upon Israel's enemies.
 - By the end of the book, Israel has become "Canaanized," being as or more corrupt morally than the surrounding nations.
 - (1) Idolatry & Religious Confusion (17:3, 5-6, 18:30-31)
 - (2) Corruption of the Levites (17:9-11; 18:19-20; 19:1)
 - (3) Moral Depravity & Civil War (19:22, 25-26; 20:12-13, 19-20)
2. The faithfulness of God both to discipline and deliver His people.
 - The Lord permitted their oppression for His purposes, yet always answered His people's prayers for help.
Judges 2:16, 20-23; 3:1-2,9,15
 - The Lord continually raised up leaders for the people and empowered them with His Spirit.
Judges 2:16,18; 3:9-10; 6:34; 14:19
3. The importance of God-ordained, Spirit-empowered leadership for the long-term good of God's people.
 - ⇒ The failure of the people know and obey the Word of the Lord demonstrated the need for faithful prophets.
 - ⇒ The idolatrous worship of the people demonstrated the need for faithful priests.
 - ⇒ The cultural assimilation and threats from their enemies demonstrated the need for faithful kings.
Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

Key Point: The book of Judges serves as a serious warning to God's people while also offering us great assurance that God will never leave or forsake us.

Concluding Thought

- The people and events of the book of Judges are to be viewed through the lens of the book of _____.

The hope for a prophet like Moses but even greater than him!

The hope for a priesthood greater than the one he ordained!

The hope for a king greater than even Moses envisioned!