

Book of Judges

Introduction

I. Title

- A. “Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel...” (Judges 1:1).
1. “Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD...” (Joshua 1:1).
 - a. “The form of the Hebrew is the usual historical one for the continuation of a narrative before commenced. The book of Joshua is thus shown to be, and intended to be, a continuation of the book of Deuteronomy, which ends with the death of Moses... This link of connection is lost in the English version” (Pulpit).
 2. “The words, *and it came to pass after the death of Joshua*, must therefore be understood... as the heading of the whole book, just as the Book of Joshua has for its heading, ‘Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass...’” (Pulpit).
- B. “Now it came about in the days when the judges governed...” (Ruth 1:1).
- C. “In those days there was no king in Israel...” (Judges 17:6).
1. “The Book of Judges, like the other historical books of the Old Testament... chiefly relates, namely, the exploits of those... who ruled Israel in the times between the death of Joshua and the rise of Samuel. The ‘rule of the judges’ (Ruth 1:1) in this limited sense was a distinct dispensation... from the leadership of Moses and Joshua... from the more regular supremacy of both Eli, the high priest, and the prophetic dispensation inaugurated by Samuel to the time of Saul, Israel’s first king (1 Sam. 3:19-21; 4:18; 12:11; Acts 13:19-21)” (Barnes).
- D. In both the Hebrew scriptures and our English Bibles, Judges immediately follows the book of Joshua. The difference is that both books, in the Hebrew canon, are placed under the category of the prophets (specifically, the former prophets), unlike the English where they are placed among the historical books, following the Septuagint.
1. ‘Law, Prophets (Former Prophets [Joshua, Judges...], Latter Prophets and Writings [Psalms...])’
 2. “Now He said to them, These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).
- E. Definition of “Judge” – 2:16 / 11:27
1. Shaphat; “A primitive root; to judge, that is, pronounce sentence (for or against); by implication to vindicate or punish; by extension to govern; passively to litigate (lit or fig)... execute (judgment)... rule” (Strong’s).
 2. “That is, leaders, generals, and governors, raised up by especial appointment of the Lord, to deliver them from, and avenge them on, their adversaries” (Clarke).
 3. These were, in the main, military leaders. What other term is used in the book to describe their special function (3:9, 15)?
 4. Ultimately, God was the Judge and the Deliverer (11:27).

II. Background and Setting

- A. The time of the judges covers a period directly following Joshua’s leadership and conquest of the land of Canaan around 1367 B.C. until the time of Saul, Israel’s first king, around 1050 B.C.
1. Moses had led Israel out of Egypt after hundreds of years in bondage; but as a consequence of his actions he would not lead them into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:1-12; Deuteronomy 1:34-38; Psalms 106:32-33).
 2. Upon the death of Moses, Joshua is appointed his successor and ordered to lead Israel in the conquest of the land of Canaan, destroying its inhabitants and their religion (Exodus 23:20-32; Numbers 33:50-56; Deuteronomy 7:1-6).
 3. Joshua was successful and faithful in his mission; however, large swathes of the land remained to be taken possession of by the tribes, west of the Jordan (Joshua 13:1-7; 16:10; 18:1-10).
- B. Judges is a tragic sequel to Joshua. In Joshua, the people were obedient to God and conquered their enemies. In Judges, they are disobedient, idolatrous, and defeated by their enemies.
1. Disobedience in failing to drive the Canaanites out of the land (Judges 1:19, 21, 35).
 2. Idolatry (2:12).

3. Intermarriage with the wicked Canaanites (3:5-6).
 4. Not heeding the judges (2:17).
 5. Turning away from God after the death of each judge (2:19).
- C. In terms of the chronology of the book and the number of years covered, there is no agreement among Biblical scholars or commentators.
1. The estimates that are given are primarily based on the two main assumptions for the date of the exodus, which are 1240 B.C. and 1450 B.C. Other considerations include the possible simultaneity¹ of both the narratives and judges (cp. 3:12-30; 10:7-8; 13:1; cf. 1 Sam. 7:13). Thrown into the mix is the reference in 1 Kings (6:1) and calculations based on the time given for Solomon's building of the temple.
 2. Counting the years of the individual judges along with the years of servitude of Israel to their oppressors give us a period of approximately 300 years. However, some commentators suggest a lesser span of time between Joshua and Solomon, arguing for a simultaneity of judges and narratives (cp. 10:7 = chps. 13-17).
 3. "Exact chronology forms no part of the plan of the book. The only guide to the chronology is to be found in the genealogies which span the period... It cannot be denied however that the chronology of this book is still a matter of uncertainty" (Barnes).

III. Author

- A. No author is named in the book, but the Jewish Talmud² identifies the author as Samuel; a key prophet who lived in the latter half of the period and could have personally summed up the era (cp. 1 Sam. 3:19-20; 10:25; cp. 7:15-17). The time was earlier than David's capture of Jerusalem (in ca. 1004 B.C.; 2 Sam. 5:6-7), since the Jebusites still controlled the city (Judges 1:21). Also, the writer deals with a time before a king ruled (17:6; 18:1; 21:25). The unadorned accounts contained in the book also point to Samuel as its most probable author (cf. 1 Sam. 12; 15:32-33; cp. Jdg. 3:20-22; 8:27).
- B. The essential integrity of the book as a trustworthy account of conditions before the rise of the Hebrew monarchy can be seen in the following data.
1. The Jebusites are mentioned as still occupying Jerusalem (1:21).
 2. Gezer was not yet conquered (1:29); a feat that was not accomplished until the days of Solomon (compare 1 Kings 9:16; cp. Jos. 10:33; 12:12; 16:3, 10).
 3. Several portions of the book are linked closely with Joshua's day (e.g., 2:6-10; cp. 1:9-13 with Joshua 15:13-17; cp. 18:27-29 with Joshua 19:47).
 4. The Phoenician city of Sidon, not the later Tyre, is still the chief port city of Phoenicia (3:3).
- C. Accordingly, the book must have been composed largely before the time of Israel's monarchy under David and Solomon. Certain literary phrases point to the fact that the work was originally that of one author (e.g., "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord," "And the land had rest," "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him," and "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes"). However, the remarks in 18:1 and 19:1 indicate that although the material covered in these passages is early, some editorial revision took place in the early period of the United Monarchy.

IV. Date

- A. The approximate date of composition may be fixed by a number of statements in the book itself. Passages within the book, such as 18:31 and 20:27, show that it was written after the Ark of the Covenant was removed from Shiloh (cf. 1 Sam. 4:3-11). The repeated phrase "In those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) indicates that Judges was written after the commencement of the monarchy. The fact that the Jebusites were in Jerusalem "to this day" (1:21) means that it was written before 1004 B.C. when David took control of the city (2 Sam. 5:5-9).

V. Purpose

- A. "Thus the main purpose of the Book of Judges in the form in which it has been preserved in the Old Testament is not to record Israel's past for its own sake, or to place before the writer's contemporaries a historical narrative of the achievements of their great men and rulers, but to use these events and the national experiences of adversity as a text from which to educe religious warning and instruction" (ISBE).

¹ "1. existing, occurring, or operating at the same time; concurrent: *simultaneous movements*; *simultaneous translation*" (Dictionary.com).

² "Talmud (i.e., doctrine, from the Hebrew word 'to learn') is a large collection of writings, containing a full account of the civil and religious laws of the Jews" (Bible Study Tools).

- B. “The author or authors spiritual edification is the first interest, and the facts or details of the history, worthy of faithful records, because it is the history of God's people, find their chief value in that they are and were designed to be admonitory, exhibiting the Divine judgments upon idolatry and sin, and conveying the lesson that disobedience and rebellion, a hard and defiant spirit that was forgetful of Yahweh, could not fail to entail the same disastrous consequences” (ISBE).
- C. “The Jews were not mistaken when they counted the Book of Judges among the Prophets. It is prophecy, more than history, because it exhibits and enforces the permanent lessons of the righteousness and justice and loving-kindness of God” (ISBE).

VI. Message/Theme

- A. Judges is thematic rather than chronological (note 18:7-8; cp Josh.19:47 with Jud.1:34-35); foremost among its themes is God’s power and covenant mercy in graciously delivering the Israelites from the consequences of their failures, which were suffered for sinful compromise (cp. 2:18-19; 21; 25).
- B. A major theme of the book is the recurring cycle of sin, servitude, supplication, salvation and rest of God’s people as they fall time and time again back into idolatry (2:11, 14, 16, 18).
 - 1. Repeated phrases:
 - a. “The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD” (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).
 - b. “The LORD gave/sold the Israelites into the hands of the enemy” (2:14; 6:1; 13:1).
 - c. “The Israelites cried out to the LORD” (3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10).
 - d. “The LORD raised up a deliverer for Israel to save them” (2:16, 18; 3:9, 15).
 - e. “And X [the oppressing nation] was made subject to Israel” (8:28; cp. 3:30; 4:23).
 - f. “Then the land was undisturbed for X years” (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28).
 - g. “Then X [the judge] died” (2:19; 3:11; 4:1b; 8:28; 12:7).
- C. Another important theme is the covenant faithfulness of the Lord; the amazing patience and long-suffering of God are no better demonstrated than during this unsettled period (note 2:11-19; Nehemiah 9:26-31).

VII. Structure of the Book

- A. Conditions in Israel (1:1-3:6).
 - 1. Failure of Israel to Drive out the Canaanites (1:1-2:5).
 - 2. Summary of Israel under the Judges (2:6-3:6).
- B. The Judges/or Oppression and Deliverance (3:7-16:31).
 - 1. Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar (3:7-31).
 - 2. Deborah and Barak (4-5).
 - 3. Gideon (6:1-8:35).
 - 4. Abimelech, Tola, Jair (9:1-10:5).
 - 5. Jephthah (10:6-12:15).
 - 6. Samson (13:1-6:31).
- C. Events Demonstrating the Spiritual and Religious Decline of Israel (17:1-21).
 - 1. The Sins of Micah the Ephraimite (17:1-13).
 - 2. The Sins of the Tribe of Dan (18:1-31).
 - 3. The Crime in Benjamin at Gibeah and its Punishment (19:1-21:25).

VIII. Benefits of Studying the Book of Judges.

- A. Old Testament written for our learning (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- B. Great examples of faith (Hebrews 11:32-34).
- C. Chief lesson of book: Sin and Its Consequences (1 Samuel 12:20-25).

Summary of the History of the Judges

Judge	Reference	Date
Othniel+	3:11	1200
Ehud+	3:14	1180
Shamgar	3:31	1170
Deborah+	5:31	1190... Barak (Hebrews 11:32)
Gideon+	8:28	1140
Abimelech*	9:22	1100
Tola	10:2	1105
Jair	10:3	1100
Jephthah+	12:7	1070
Ibzan	12:9	1070
Elon	12:11	1070
Abdon	12:14	1070
Samson+	15:20	1070
Eli#	1 Sam. 4:18	1100
Samuel#	1 Sam. 7:15	1060

Note: These dates assume 1240 B.C. for the entry into Canaan and 1040 B.C. for the accession of Saul.

* Self-appointed ruler, not God appointed.

Not treated in the book of Judges

+ Detailed accounts



