

NAME

The title “judges” is taken from the Charismatic military leaders ruling Israel during this period. These were generally men God raised up in times of enslavement to deliver His people. Following deliverance, these popular heroes were looked upon with respect and assumed leadership roles among the people.

The name “Judge” as applied goes beyond merely one who intervenes in legal matters. The name meant two things: 1) To deliver the people from the oppressors (Judges 2:16); and 2) To settle disputes and maintain justice (Judges 4:5). Judges were enabled by the Spirit to lead God’s people to victory. The Spirit comes and goes enabling each judge for a specific task. The marks of victory equal the result of the Spirit’s work (Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14). The work of the Spirit in the nation can be seen as a foreshadowing of the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer:

AUTHOR

The author is anonymous and cannot be known with certainty. The context seems to point to Samuel. Jewish tradition attributes the book to Samuel and he seems to fit the circumstances. He was a writer and an educator (1 Samuel 10:25). The book seems to have been written during the period of the Monarchy because of the closing summary statement: *“In those days there as no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 21:25) meaning that the writer was probably writing from a time when there was a king. It was probably written about the time of Saul.

DATE

Judges seems to have been written prior to Jerusalem being taken by David (note that it is still called Jebus, and the Jebusites are still there - Judges 1:21). Given the date of the Exodus as 1446 B.C., the Wilderness Wanderings of 40 years, and the time of Joshua and Elders of Israel as 25 years, the beginning of the time of the Judges would be at approximately 1381 B.C.

There is no agreement among scholars about the chronology of Judges. According to 1 Kings 6:1 there was a period of 480 years between the Exodus from Egypt and the building of the temple under Solomon. The period of the Judges (if adding to total years of rest and oppression) is approximately 410 years. This would put the date of Samuel at 971 B.C. which is impossible given that the beginning date of Solomon’s reign is 970 B.C. and the date Temple construction was begun was 966 B.C. (see Halley Chart page 188 and Halley’s comments below).

In Acts 13:20 we read, *“All this too about 450 years. And after that He gave them judges until Samule the prophet.”* This common reading is considered by many to be incorrect. They make a paragraph of the history related in this chapter, beginning with verse 17: *“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers...”* Then they refer the period of 480 years to the time from the choice of the “fathers” to the time of Samuel.

Many episodes in Judges overlap each other, unfolding in different parts of the land. This overlapping of periods (while recording chronological history) is not a phenomenon unique to Israel. The same method of historical recording was also practiced in Egypt. The practical result of this overlapping is that while we have a more complete picture of what took place during this period. However, we are not able to accurately date it and to ascertain its duration.

However the matter is settled, it is evident that the writer of Judges did not plan to give a historical chronology.

The Period of The Judges - Halley page 187 / see map page 7 (The Setting of Judges)

The Hebrew nation, after the death of Joshua, had no strong central government. They were a confederacy of 12 independent tribes, with no unifying element except their God. The form of government in the days of the Judges is spoken of as a "theocracy," that is, God Himself was supposed to be the direct ruler of the nation. But the people did not take their God very seriously - they were continually falling into idolatry. Being more or less in a state of anarchy, harassed at times by civil war among themselves, and surrounded by enemies who made attempt after attempt to exterminate them, the Hebrew nation was very slow in its national development. The Israelites did not become a great nation until they were organized into a kingdom in the days of Samuel and David.

The exact duration of the period of the Judges is uncertain. When we add all the years of the oppressions, of the individual Judges, and of the periods of rest, they add up to 410 years. But some of these figures may overlap. Jephthah, who lived near the end of the period spoke of it as 300 years (Judges 11:26). It is thought to have been, in round numbers, about 300 years, roughly from about 1400 until 1100 B.C. The entire period from Exodus to King Solomon, which includes also the 40-year period of travel through the wilderness as well as the eras of Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David, is given as 480 years in 1 Kings 6:1.

There were also oppressions by Sidonians and Maonites (Judges 10:12).

Conditions During The Period

Following the time of Joshua, Israel was without a national leader. Every man was a law unto himself. Every tribe was a law unto itself. God's people experienced internal as well as external conflict. Anarchy and idolatry were rampant. God's people had failed to cleanse the land of the heathen with their idols and pagan religions and so God's people were continually being dominated by them. From without they were being harassed by enemies on all sides.

About Baal, Ashtaroath, and Asherah (Judges 2:13; 3:7 - cf. Numbers 22:41; 1 Kings 15:29-33)

Baal is the name of the supreme male divinity of the Phoenician and Canaanite nations. Ashtaroath was the supreme female divinity. Both names are often used in the plural, designating not many statues but many modifications of the gods themselves (Judges 8:33; 2 Kings 1:2,3,16). The name means "lord" in the sense of "master, owner, possessor" (Hosea 2:16). The rites of worship were abominable, cruel, and licentious. They sacrificed not only captured enemies but also their own children.

The worship of Baal among the Jews was done with pomp and ceremony. Temples were erected to him (1 Kings 16:32; 2 Kings 11:18); his images were set up (2 Kings 10:26); his altars were very numerous (Jeremiah 11:13); were erected on lofty eminences (1 Kings 18:20), and on the roofs of houses (Jeremiah 32:29); there were priests in great numbers (1 Kings 18:19), and of various classes (2 Kings 10:19); the worshippers appear to have been arrayed in appropriate robes (2 Kings 10:22); the worship was performed by burning incense (Jeremiah 7:9), and offering burnt sacrifices which occasionally consisted of human victims (Jeremiah 19:5).

The groves are connected with Ashtaroath, which was perhaps the proper name of the goddess, while Asherah is the name of the image or symbol which was of wood - or the groves where she was worshipped (1 Kings 16:32,33).

Note: Molock also came from Phoenicia. Worship included the sacrifice of children who were burned alive or killed and then burned as an offering.

THEME

Type of Literature: History & Government

Halley (page 43): First 300 years in the land

Mitchell: Failure Through Compromise / The Book of Apostasy

In Joshua we saw the victory of faith, but in Judges one finds the failure of unbelief. Because they did not really believe in God, Israel did not fully obey God's command to exterminate the Canaanites. Rather they compromised and tried to live with them. Slowly they too on their idolatrous and vile practices.

It is a dark page in the annals of Hebrew history. Unger refers to it as, "*The monotony and misery of sin.*"

As the book of Joshua closes, Israel was at least partially established in the land of promise. The tribes had settled in the districts assigned to them. However, the Lord had said to Joshua, "*There remains yet very much land to possess*" (Joshua 13:1b). Hence, unconquered Canaanites surrounded Israel's borders and even separated the central tribes from the northern and southern groups. Rather than finish the job that God had given them to do, they rested on their laurels.

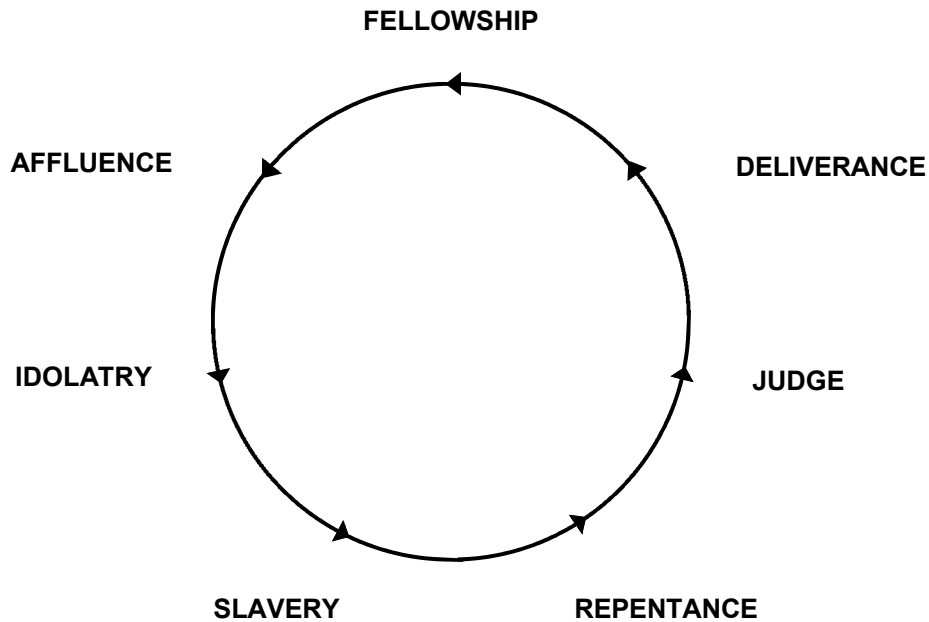
The book of Judges records the consequence of such half-hearted obedience. God's people began to assimilate the pagan cultures, languages, and religions of their unconquered neighbors. The once virile people became an important loose confederacy around the central shrine at Shiloh. Thus they were easy prey to invaders.

Joshua and Judges Compared

<u>Joshua</u>	<u>Judges</u>
Victory.....	Defeat
Freedom	Servitude
Faith	Unbelief
Progress	Decline
Spiritual Vision	Earthly Involvement
Allegiance to God	Apostasy (from God)
Joy.....	Sorrow
Strength.....	Weakness
Unity	Anarchy
Sin Judged.....	Sin Tolerated

The Cycle of History (see chart below)

One can discern a cycle of history running through the book of Judges. As the book commences, Israel is in fellowship with God. This fellowship results in affluence which, in turn, leads to idolatry. This prompts God to chasten Israel by allowing an enemy to bring them into bondage. In their slavery and suffering Israel cries out to God in genuine repentance. Whereupon God raises up a judge by which He delivers His people from oppression. Israel is then back in fellowship with God and the whole cycle begins again. This cycle occurs seven times through the book of Judges. It seems that Israel never learned from previous experiences, but kept repeating the mistakes of the past. Painfully obvious is the correspondence between the history of Israel and our own lives.



The purpose of the Book of Judges is not to give an accurate chronological history but to describe the character of the time in which Israel was without a king and to show the need for such rule.

Key Word (Nelson's): "Cycles" The Book of Judges is written primarily on a thematic rather than chronological basis (16-21 actually precede 3-15). The author uses the accounts of various judges to prove the utter failure of living out the closing verse of Judges: *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 21:25).

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He said, 'Because this people has transgressed My covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed My voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died.'" (Judges 2:20,21).

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): Chapter 2: The second chapter of Judges is a miniature of the whole book as it records the transition of the godly to the ungodly generation, the format of the cycles, and the purpose of God in not destroying the Canaanites.

Outline:

- I. Apostasy Commenced 1:1-3:4
 1. The Sin of Compromise 1:1-36
 2. The Story of Corruption 2:1-3:4
- II. Apostasy Contested 3:5-16:31

Seven Cycles of Oppression (see above)

III. Apostasy Characterized 17:1-21:25
Supplement to illustrate the depravity of this period

1. Apostasy of the Individual 17:1-6
2. Apostasy in the Priesthood 17:7-13
3. Apostasy in the Nation 18:1-21:25

RECIPIENTS

God's people - specifically the Hebrews...and us.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Why is such a book in the Bible?

It is simple history. God had founded a nation for the purpose of paving the way for the coming of a Redeemer for the human race. God was determined to maintain that nation. And in spite of its idolatry and its wickedness, God did maintain it. If it hadn't been for such leaders as the Judges (as fallibly human as they were), and if God had not miraculously intervened in times of crisis, Israel would have been exterminated. (Halley page 194)

Personal (What we can learn)

- When we're not right with God we're not right with society either
- God's purpose is not frustrated by human failure
- God can use even someone like me

About God

This is the most remarkable Biblical history of the long-suffering of God towards Israel. Learn about the long-suffering patience of God

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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