

#7. THE BOOK OF JUDGES

1. **Judges is the second book of the historical narratives of the Old Testament.** It contains the story of the second and subsequent generations of Israel who lived in the Land after the death of Joshua. The book revolves around two truths: (1) Sin and apostasy will surely result in judgment; (2) and if we turn to Him, His forgiveness and help is just as certain.

2. **The author is unknown, but the Talmud names Samuel as the writer (also see 1 Samuel 10:25).** The date of composition is probably soon after the coronation of Saul. Scripture declares “there was no king in Israel during those days”. The natural inference is that at the time of writing, there was a king in Israel. Also, the reference to the Jebusites in 1:21 points to a time prior to David’s capture of Jerusalem. The events covered the period of time between 1375 BC and 1050 BC, or about 325 years.

3. **Key Chapters**
 - Chapters 1:1-3:6 discloses the failure of Israel to completely subdue the land of Canaan. They had conquered the nations under Joshua, but were in danger of losing the gains they had made because of their compromise and loss of devotion.

 - Chapter 2 in particular is a view of Judges in miniature. It reveals the transition from righteousness to wickedness, and the resulting spiritual/situational cycles used by God to redeem Israel.

 - Six periods of “Judges” or “deliverers” are found in 3:7-16:31
 - o The deliverances by Othniel (3:7-11).
 - o The deliverances by Ehud and Shamgar (3:12-31).
 - o The deliverances by Deborah and Barak (4:1- 5:31).
 - o The deliverances by Gideon, Tola and Jair (6:1-10:5).
 - o The deliverances by Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (10:6-12:15).
 - o The deliverances by Samson (13:1-16:31).

 - Chapters 17:1 - 21:25 detail the idolatry of the tribe of Dan and the civil war against the tribe of Benjamin.

4. Key Verses

- **Judges 2:10 NIV** - “After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.”
- **Judges 17:6 NASB** - “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.” See also 21:25.

5. Key People

- Othniel - judged Israel for about 40 years and was noted for conquering a strong city.
- Ehud - judged Israel for about 80 years. He is noted for his victories against King Eglon and the Moabites
- Shamgar - noted for killing 600 Philistines with an ox-goad (staff).
- Deborah - ruled about 40 years and was assisted by Barak. She is noteworthy for her defeat of Sisera, King Jabin and the Canaanites of Hazor. She is the only female deliverer of Israel.
- Barak - was a deliverer who fought alongside Deborah. Together they ruled for about 40 years.
- Gideon - a strong leader for 40 years, he is noted for destroying his family idols. He raised an army of 10,000 Israelites, but defeated 135,00 Midianites with 300 men. Along with Deborah and Barak, he is mentioned as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11.
- Tola - ruled Israel for 23 years.
- Jair - ruled for 22 years, and is noted for having 30 sons.
- Jephthah - he defeated the Ammonites, and ruled Israel for 6 years.
- Ibzan - ruled Israel for 7 years while producing 30 sons and 30 daughters.
- Elon - was a deliverer in Israel for a decade.

- Abdon - ruled 8 years, and 40 sons and 30 grandsons. His wealth was substantial because each of these 70 men owned his own donkey.
- Samson - the best known of the Judges, he delivered Israel from the Philistines during a 20 year period. Before he was betrayed by Delilah, he burned Philistine wheat fields, killed a lion with his bare hands, killed 1,000 men with a donkey's jawbone, and carried away a city gate weighing nearly a ton. His final act was the destruction of a Philistine meeting hall, resulting in the death of thousands of Philistine Lords.

6. Key Places

- Jericho - the scene of the assassination of King Eglon.
- Hazor - the seat of government for King Jabin, who was defeated by Deborah and Barak.
- The Hill of Moreh - the scene of Gideon's defeat of the Midianites.
- Shechem - the scene of a rebellion against Abimelech, a self-proclaimed king and son of Gideon.
- Timneh, the Valley of Sorek, and Gaza- scenes of Samson's crusade against the people of Philistia.
- The Hill Country of Ephraim - the home of Micah, the man who set up his own shrine.
- Dan (Laish) - a captured city that became the center of worship for the tribe of Dan.
- Gibeah - a city in Benjamin. The scene of a horrible murder that resulted in a terrible desecration of the land.
- Mizpah - the scene of judgment against the men of Gibeah guilty of murder.

7. Key Themes

- ***Sin destroys nations*** - The victories of Joshua were not forgotten. The benefits earned by Joshua were lost by Israel after the death of the Joshua generation.

- ***Repentance brings restoration*** - In every instance, when Israel turned from her sin, The Lord raised up a deliverer to restore their fortunes.
- **Jehovah is both Judge and Deliverer** - The Lord will deal with our sin, but we will also come to our defense when we turn to Him in repentance.

8. The Contents of Judges

- The Decline of Israel (1:1- 3:6)
 - (1) The Tribes of Judah and Simeon go to war against the Canaanites and Perizzites (1:1-18).
 - (2) Conquest of the Land had not been completed (1:19-2:5)
 - (3) The death of Joshua and the sin of Israel (2:6-3:6).
- The Deliverers (3:7-16:1)
 - o The deliverance of Israel by Othniel (3:7-11).
 - o The deliverance of Israel by Ehud and Shamgar (3:12-31).
 - o The deliverance of Israel by Deborah and Barak (4:1- 5:31).
 - o The deliverance of Israel by Gideon, Tola and Jair (6:1-10:5).
 - o The deliverance of Israel by Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (10:6-12:15).
 - o The deliverance of Israel by Samson (13:1-16:31).
- Examples of Israel's Apostasy (17:1-21:25)
 - (1) The story of Micah's Idols (17:1-12).
 - (2) The story of Idolatry in the tribe of Dan (18:1-31).
 - (3) The story of Murder in Gibeah (19:1-30).
 - (4) The story of Civil War against the tribe of Benjamin (20:1-21:25).

Worth noting:

- The repeating cycle of this era is: (1) apostasy, (2) oppression, (3) repentance, and (4) deliverance.

- With the inclusion of Eli and Samuel, there are 15 Judges raised up by God for Israel.

- **When reading Judges:**
 - o Remember that the “Judges” mentioned are not judicial officers, but are military leaders and/or clan chieftains who were special leaders for Israel during difficult days.
 - o Their leadership was not usually over the entire nation, but rather over certain tribes or sections of Israel. The period of the Judges was a time with little or no central government.
 - o The book of Ruth occurs in the time of the Judges.