
BOOK OF JUDGES

Approximate date: 1000 B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); before 586 B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate; some Left); mid-to-late 500s B.C.E. (some Left)

Time period: Israel living in the Promised Land without a king

Author: Samuel (Right); Israel's court historians and further editors (conservative-moderate); Israel's court historians or an unknown exile from the Southern Kingdom (Left)

Location of author: Land of Israel (Right, some conservative-moderate); Jerusalem, Babylon, and/or Land of Israel (some conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and their location: people of Israel having subdued the Land of Canaan (Right, conservative-moderate); Jewish religious leaders during the reign of King Josiah and/or Jewish exiles living in Babylon or returning from Babylon (Left)

People:

Canaanites, Perizzites, Adoni-Bezek, Caleb, Othniel, Benjamites, Jebusites, Amorites, Baals and Ashtoreths (local deities), Philistines, Sidonians, Hivites, Hittites, Amorites, Cushan-Rishathaim, Eglon, Ammonites, Amalekites, Ehud (son of Gera), Shamgar (son of Anath), Jabin (king of Canaan), Sisera, Deborah, Lappidoth, Barak (son of Abinoam), Jael, Heber the Kenite, Midianites, Joash the Abiezrite, Gideon, Jerub-Baal (name for Gideon), Purah, Oreb Zeeb, Abiezer, Zebah, Zalmunnah, Jether, Abimelech, Baal-Berith (deity), Jotham, Gaal (son of Ebed), Zebul, Tola (son of Puah, son of Dodo), Jair, Egyptians, Maonites, Jephthah, Gilead, Chemosh (deity), Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (son of Hillel), Manoah, Samson, Delilah, Dagon (deity), Micah, Jonathan

People mentioned:

Joshua, Sheshai, Ahiman, Talmai, Sihon, Balak, Phinehas, Eleazar, Aaron

Places:

Bezek, Jerusalem, Negev, Hebron (Kiriath Arba), Debir (Kiriath Sepher), City of Palms, Desert of Judah, Zephath/Hormah, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Bethel (Luz), land of the Hittites, Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, Gezer, Kitron, Nahalol, Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, Rehob, Beth Shemesh, Beth Anath, Mount Hereb, Aijalon, Shaalbim, Scorpion Pass, Sela, Gilgal, Bokim, Canaan, Lebanon, Mount Baal Hermon, Lebo Hamath, Aram Naharaim (Mesopotamia), Moab, Jordan, Hazor, Harosheth Haggoyim, Palm of Deborah, Ramah, Kedesh (in Naphtali), Mount Tabor, Kishon River, Seir, Edom, Midian, Ophrah, Valley of Jezreel, spring of Harod, hill of Moreh, Mount Gilead, Beth Shittah, Zererah, Abel Meholah, Tabbath Succoth, Peniel, Karkor, Pass of Heres, Shechem, Beth Millo, Mount Gerizim, Beer, Mount Zalmon, Thebez, Shamir, Havvoth Jair, Kamon,

Mizpah, land of Tob, Minnith, Abel Keramim, Zaphon, Bethlehem, Pirathon, Zorah, Mahaneh Dan, Eshtaol, Timnah, Ashkelon, Etham, Lehi, Ramath Lehi, En Hakkore, Valley of Sorek, Laish (Dan), Kiriath Jearim, Beth Rehob, Shiloh, Gibeah, Baal Tamar, Ramah, Beersheba, Jabesh Gilead, rock of Rimmon, Lebonah

Places mentioned:

Egypt, Timnath Heres, Mount Gaash, Sinai, Makir, Arnon, Jabbok, Red Sea, Jahaz, Heshbon

Key Themes and Events:

Israel is forced to deal with remaining Canaanites that were not routed during the Conquest / the Lord rebukes Israel for leaving Canaanite survivors in the Promised Land / those who follow Joshua's generation fall into idolatry, worshipping the local Baals and Ashtoreths / the Lord raises up judges to call the people back to Him / the Lord plans to use the local Canaanites to test the loyalty of Israel to Him / Othniel is raised up as a judge, defeating the king of Aram / Eglon king of Moab subjects Israel / Ehud assassinates the fat Eglon, and Moab becomes subjected to Israel / Deborah arises as judge over Israel, directing Barak to defeat the army of Jabin / Jael drives a tent peg into Jabin's head / Deborah and Barak sing a song of victory / Israel rebels against the Lord, and so Midianites, Amalekites, and others trespass and ruin their crops / Gideon is called out by God to deliver Israel from Midian, although he needs to be reassured several times that He has truly called him / the men of Gideon are divided at the Lord's request / the Midianite camp is routed by Gideon's forces during the night, later being pursued / Gideon pursues Zebah and Zalmunna, killing them / Gideon dies and the good things he had done for Israel are forgotten / Abimelech, son of Gideon, kills all of his brothers save Jotham / Abimelech arises over Israel as a political adventurer / Gaal tries to rally an insurrection against Abimelech / Abimelech kills the people of Shechem, and destroys the city / Abimelech sets fire to the tower of Shechem / Abimelech is killed by one of his soldiers, after a woman drops a millstone on his head / Tola arises as a ruler of Israel / Jair arises as a ruler of Israel / the Israelites once again fall into sin and serve the gods of their neighbors / the elders of Gilead ask Jephthah to lead the fight against the Ammonites / Jephthah carries on a correspondence with the king of Ammon, telling him what land Israel has truly occupied / Jephthah tells the Lord that if He gives him a victory against Ammon, he will make a burnt offering of the first thing that comes to meet him when returning home / Jephthah's virgin daughter is the first to meet him after his victory / Jephthah's daughter is given two months because she will never marry / Jephthah, as a Gileadite, defeats some renegade Ephraimites / Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon all arise as rulers over Israel / Israel rebels against God, and so they are delivered into the hands of the Philistines / God promises Manoah's wife that she will have a son, but he is to be raised as a Nazirite / Manoah and his wife encounter a messenger of the Lord / Samson is born / Samson kills a lion with his bare hands, later taking some honey from the lion's carcass / those who attend Samson's wedding banquet are confronted by a riddle / Samson goes down to Ashkelon, killing thirty, and giving their belongings to the thirty who attended his banquet / Samson sends pairs of foxes with torches to burn the Philistine fields / the Philistines kill Samson's wife and her father / the Philistines extend their influence over Judah / the Judahites tie up Samson, taking him to the Philistines to be killed / Samson breaks free of his restraints, and kills Philistines /

Samson rules Israel / Samson escapes from Gaza by lifting up a city gate / Samson falls for the Philistine woman Delilah / Delilah is encouraged to find the source of Samson's strength / Delilah has Samson's braids of hair shaved, causing him to lose his strength / Samson is seized by the Philistines, who gouge out his eyes and take him as a prisoner to Gaza / the Lord gives Samson the strength to push down the pillars of Dagon's temple, and he dies with the people as the structure collapses / a Levite comes to live with Micah, serving as his personal priest in the presence of a silver idol / some Danites come and they plunder Micah of his possessions and idol / Laish is renamed Dan, where the Danites serve Micah's idol / a Levite's concubine is brutally raped by the inhabitants of a town while he travels / an Israelite vigilante force is assembled to enact vengeance upon the people of Gibeah / the tribe of Benjamin suffers a devastating defeat, and considerable losses, at the hands of the other tribes / arrangements are made for the Benjamites to not fall into extinction among the other tribes of Israel

Key Scriptures: Judges 2:1-3, 10-11, 16-19; 3:20-22; 4:8-9; 5:7-9; 7:22-24; 10:11-16; 11:27, 29-31; 13:3-5; 17:6; 18:18-21; 19:1; 21:25 / **The Military Failure of Israel** (1:1-3:4); **The Rescue of Israel by the Judges** (3:5-16:31); **The Moral Failure of Israel** (17:1-21:25)

Theological Summary: The Book of Judges records the period immediately following the death of Joshua up until the establishment of Israel's monarchy, detailing the lives of some of the elders who would lead Israel.¹ During this time of Israel's history, the people fail to adhere to the agreement that they have made with God, they fall into sin and idolatry, and God must intervene via various "judges" or leaders who bring them back from the brink of disaster. It presents a cycle of rebellion, judgment, and repentance many times over.

The Hebrew title of Judges is *Shoftim* (שׁוֹפְטִים), a participle which means "those judging," derived from Judges 2:16: "Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them." The term *shoftim* could also be rendered as "chieftains."² These men and women functioned as military leaders and deliverers of Israel in their times of great trial, and called them back to faith in the God they had largely abandoned. "In some respects the title of the book is a bit misleading to English readers. The 'judges' were not primarily judicial officials; rather, they were military leaders and clan chieftains who appeared periodically in different areas among the tribes to affect deliverance from enemies threatening parts of Israel" (Dillard and Longman).³ Most of the judges we see in this text were local leaders and tribal rulers who were brought in to mediate major disputes.⁴

In the Christian canon, the Book of Judges is considered one of the Historical Books. In slight contrast, the Jewish canon places Judges as one of the Former Prophets,⁵ as it is considered appropriate to consider the works of the judges as being prophetic, calling the

¹ Herbert Wolf, "Judges," in *EXP*, 3:375.

² F.C. Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:1156; Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:375; Yairah Amit, "Judges," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 508.

³ Dillard and Longman, 119; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 680-681.

⁴ C.F. Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1014.

⁵ Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:1157; Robert G. Boling, "Judges, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:1107.

people back to the Lord and His covenant. These figures “execute the judgment of God on their behalf” (Bruce, *NBCR*),⁶ as Israel agreed to be chastised if they fell away from God’s commandments in the Torah. In Judges we see that the people have been unable to hold themselves to God’s standard, and so judges rise up to call them back to Him. Ultimately, God is asserted to be the ultimate Judge and Deliverer of Israel (11:27; cf. 8:23), even though there are a total of thirteen judges depicted in this text. In total, there were fifteen judges who led Israel, ending with Eli and Samuel.⁷

The Book of Judges portrays the constant disarray in the Land of Israel, which resulted in a great deal of Divine chastening. “Between the days of Joshua and Samuel, Israel plummeted to moral and spiritual disaster” (*EXP*).⁸ Judges depicts a cyclical pattern of rebellion, chastisement or Divine punishment, repentance, a productive seasonal calm, followed by rebellion once again. God raises up the judges to specifically call the people back to holiness and obedience, as Israel’s call of building God’s Kingdom on Earth was not fully accomplished. Israel in Canaan was affected by the local religious beliefs. The Book of Judges candidly portrays the influence of (gross) sin upon a society that has made a definitive commitment to God and His ways, and bridges the gap between the Conquest of Canaan by Joshua and the beginning of Israel’s monarchy.

The text of Judges is divided into three major sections: a prologue (1:1-3:6), a main body detailing the deeds of the judges (3:7-16:31), and an epilogue that adds additional details (chs. 17-21). It is notable that some parts of Judges do not occur in chronological order.⁹ The main body of Judges consists of a series of narrative units, depicting the various seasons of evil that the Israelites performed in the eyes of God, and how they fell out of faith with Him.¹⁰ There are five major judges that we see in Israel, including: Ehud (3:12-30); Deborah (chs. 4-5), Gideon and his son Abimelech (chs. 6-9), Jephthah (10:6-12:7), and Samson (chs. 13-16). The epilogue ends the Book of Judges summarizing the total effect of the moral decay and corruption, cataloging some additional events that occurred during the period of the judges.

Fixing precise dates for the events of Judges can be very difficult for a number of reasons. The dating of Judges’ events is tied to the timing of the Exodus (see **Exodus** entry for a summarization of the conservative debates over the timing of the Exodus), and it also depends how numbers such as 10, 20, 40, and 80 are used in the text. Are these to be considered exact numbers or rounded numbers?¹¹ It is probably best to consider them rounded numbers, notably as “It is clear from certain parts of Judges that events occurred simultaneously” (*ISBE*),¹² lest we end up with a greater period of years that history and archaeology simply do not afford us.

Some conservatives date the events in Judges as occurring at the start of the Fourteenth Century B.C.E., extending to the Tenth Century B.C.E., a period of about 400 years. Other

⁶ F.F. Bruce, “Judges,” in *NBCR*, 252.

⁷ Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:375.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:376.

⁹ Kraft, “Judges, Book of,” in *IDB*, 2:1020; Amit, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 508.

¹⁰ Boling, “Judges, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:1107.

¹¹ Kraft, “Judges, Book of,” in *IDB*, 2:1020; Fensham, “Judges, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1158.

¹² Fensham, “Judges, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1158.

conservatives, dating the Exodus in the Thirteenth Century B.C.E., consider the period of Judges to last only about 200 years.¹³ This second view places the events of Judges at the beginning of the Iron Age, and appears to be the majority opinion among evangelical Christian scholars. Either way, this would still place the earliest composition of Judges, or its sources, at the Eleventh or Tenth Century B.C.E. Most significant for any theological examination of Judges is that the interpreter cannot hold the chronology of Judges to modern, Western standards of timekeeping. Harrison makes the important point,

“[T]he total picture [of Judges], while coherent artistically, might ultimately fail to meet the exacting specifications of the modern occidental chronologist or historian. When it is remembered that ancient scribes did not draw up synchronistic tables or lists like those common today, but utilized principles of selectivity whose nature is still largely obscure, it will be seen that there is sufficient ground for restraint in approaching the problems of chronology in Judges.”¹⁴

Many conservative theologians will argue for some kind of literary unity in the Book of Judges. The traditional Jewish authorship of the text is given to Samuel, along with the Book(s) of Samuel (b.*Bava Batra* 14b).¹⁵ As a result, many conservatives believe that Samuel is the principal compiler of the accounts of Judges, and that his successors Nathan and Gad may have edited them into a more final form (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:29). There are, however, many other conservatives who consider Samuelist authorship to be “without any historical basis” (*ISBE*)¹⁶ and consider the text of Judges to be ultimately anonymous.¹⁷ “The book makes no clear claim to authorship or date of composition” (*NIDB*).¹⁸

Some of Judges may have been written before Israel’s monarchy.¹⁹ The text portrays the Jebusites still controlling Jerusalem (1:21), making it something that occurred before David’s capture of the city (2 Samuel 5:6-10). The Canaanites are portrayed as living in Gezer (1:29), a city captured during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 9:16).²⁰ “The oldest part of the book is probably the poem of Deborah. The style of the poem is in accordance with the common style of poetry at the end of the 2nd millennium” (*ISBE*).²¹

This does not mean that all of Judges had to be written before the monarchy. The phrase “In those days there was no king in Israel” (17:6) repeats itself several times, and is evidence that certain segments of the text were written after the establishment of the monarchy (cf. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Chs. 17-21 were likely composed after the establishment of the Davidic dynasty, and later edits during the time of Israel’s monarchy are definite.²² We see a reference in 18:30 to the idolatrous worship at Dan “until the day of the captivity of the land,” which is

¹³ Bruce, in *NBCR*, 252-253; Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:376.

¹⁴ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 692.

¹⁵ “Samuel wrote the book that is called by his name and the book of Judges and Ruth” (b.*Bava Batra* 14b; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

¹⁶ Fensham, “Judges, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1158; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 689.

¹⁷ Fensham, “Judges, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1158; Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:377; Dillard and Longman, 120.

¹⁸ Steven Barabas, “Judges, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 555.

¹⁹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 689.

²⁰ Cf. Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:378.

²¹ Fensham, “Judges, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:1158; cf. Boling, “Judges, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:1109.

²² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 688-689; Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:378.

likely a reference to the conquest of Galilee during Tiglath-Pileser III in 733 B.C.E. Furthermore, 18:31 speaks of a time before the destruction of Shiloh during the life of Samuel.²³

Liberal theologians of the past often tried to connect the composition of Judges to the JEDP documentary hypothesis of the Torah,²⁴ arguing that the J and E writers were also compilers of Ancient Israel's early history (see **Genesis** entry for a summarization of the JEDP documentary hypothesis). This theory, however, has largely been abandoned with the proposition of Martin Noth's unified composition hypothesis of a "Deuteronomistic history" of Joshua-Kings.²⁵ Liberals today will largely adhere to this idea, and advocate that Judges was probably written during the Josianic reforms of Seventh Century B.C.E., concurrent with certain theological themes seen throughout Joshua, Samuel, and Kings.²⁶

On the whole, liberals will generally advocate that Judges was written immediately before or immediately after the fall of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon, and argue that the issues that the text addresses better fit this later period than the Twelfth-Tenth Centuries B.C.E. Interestingly enough, current trends in liberal handling of Judges indicate the opinion that a connection to Deuteronomy cannot be made, and that Judges in its final form was composed in the Eighth or Seventh Century B.C.E.,²⁷ reflecting the shock of the Southern Kingdom to the fall of the Northern Kingdom.²⁸ It is then believed that Judges was adapted in some form for Joshua-Kings. Other liberals advocate that Judges was redacted twice: once prior to the exile, and then immediately after the exile.²⁹ Those who advocate this assert, "Rarely did the redactional activity in the body of the book invade essential contents of narratives" (*ABD*).³⁰

The most significant problem among liberals and the text of Judges concerns the historicity of the text. Some consider Judges to be nothing more than "A remarkable collection of folklore, tribal traditions, and hero tales combined with historical fragments, theological insight, and editorial opinion" (*IDBSup*).³¹ Many doubt that all of the events that Judges portrays were factual, although there "are likely kernels of genuine historical memory" (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*).³² "Modern research has abandoned the conservative view, which accepted the bulk of the book of Judges as historically authentic" (*Jewish Study Bible*).³³ Liberals often consider Judges as "essentially religious literature rather than a historical

²³ Bruce, in *NBCR*, 253.

²⁴ Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1019-1020; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 682-684; Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:377-378; Boling, "Judges, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:1114.

²⁵ Dillard and Longman, 122.

²⁶ Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1019-1020; Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:1158; Dillard and Longman, pp 120-121; Amit, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 509.

²⁷ Amit, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 344.

²⁸ M.G. Rogers, "Judges, Book of," in *IDBSup*, 510.

²⁹ Rogers, "Judges, Book of," in *IDBSup*, 514; Boling, "Judges, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:1114.

³⁰ Boling, "Judges, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:1113.

³¹ Rogers, "Judges, Book of," in *IDBSup*, 509.

³² Paula M. McNutt, "Judges," in *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 343; cf. Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1022.

³³ Amit, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 510.

document" (*IDB*).³⁴ They view Ancient Israel as being much more primitive, nomadic, and disorganized than it is portrayed in Scripture.

Many conservatives, in response to some of the liberal views of Judges, do acknowledge the affect or influence of Deuteronomy on the text. "The historians from Joshua to 2 Kings display the 'Deuteronomic' philosophy of history, so called because it finds its clearest expression in Deuteronomy" (Bruce, *NBCR*).³⁵ There are conservatives, concurring with some liberals, who adhere to a unified authorship of Judges probably during the Josianic reforms of 621 B.C.E.³⁶ These are conservatives who are more likely to side with Noth's hypothesis of unity between Joshua-Kings, than Judges being an extension of the JEDP hypothesis. Still, others believe "the whole idea of an ancient Deuteronomist is hypothetical and difficult to prove" (*ISBE*),³⁷ and argue for an earlier primary composition of the text.

Conservative consensus on Judges' composition is at present unclear, as it may very well be that Judges reached its final form immediately prior to the exile.³⁸ We have to remember that the accounts of the judges would have originally been a part of the Southern Kingdom's royal annals, and would not have been preserved in the same way as the Torah. Time attributed Judges its canonical and inspired state. It is important to consider, however, that we do not have to ascribe a Seventh Century original composition date to Judges, as there are parallels between the patterns of Judges' writing and Hittite writing of the Sixteenth Century B.C.E., some 900 years or so earlier:

"A Hittite king named Telepinus, who lived about 1500 B.C., wrote a proclamation in which he reviewed the sad sequence of events that befell his disunited country. His edict established a clear law of succession to the throne to avoid civil war and chaos, two of the evils the author of Judges wanted to see eliminated from Israel" (*EXP*).³⁹

More than anything else, conservative scholarship today is most concerned with examining Judges from a literary perspective.⁴⁰ "Viewed holistically it furnished a remarkably coherent picture of a specific age in Hebrew history, the general political, cultural, geographical, and religious aspects of which are consistent with what is now known of Palestine between 1200 and 1000 B.C." (Harrison).⁴¹

The Hebrew text of Judges in its final form "has been unusually well preserved" (*IDB*).⁴² "[T]he MT of the book of Judges is considered to be, on the whole, the best evidence for the original text...although obviously individual passages must be judged on their own merits" (*IDB*).⁴³ This indicates that since the finalization of the Masoretic Text since the Ninth-Tenth Centuries C.E. that the Hebrew has been preserved relatively intact. However, there are

³⁴ Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1013.

³⁵ Bruce, in *NBCR*, 253; cf. Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:1158.

³⁶ Bruce, in *NBCR*, 253; Dillard and Longman, 121.

³⁷ Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:1158.

³⁸ Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1022.

³⁹ Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:379; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 685-686.

⁴⁰ Dillard and Longman, 123.

⁴¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 689.

⁴² Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1014.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

significant variations of Judges in the Greek Septuagint A and B versions,⁴⁴ and fragments of Judges found among the Dead Sea Scrolls will occasionally reflect an LXX reading over the MT.⁴⁵ Any variants must, by necessity, be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The dominant issue of Judges is undoubtedly the final authority and Lordship of Israel's God. The people of Israel are called by the judges back to the covenant that they made with Him at Mount Sinai (Exodus chs. 19-24), which is reaffirmed on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 29), and then by Joshua at Shechem (Joshua 24). Israel has quickly forgotten that God is its King. Judges 17:6 easily summarizes⁴⁶ the problem of the people in Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." "When the nation turned to God in obedience, God graciously sent deliverers to rescue the people from oppression. When they disregarded Joshua's warnings and worshiped the deities of Canaan, the nation came under the control of tyrants and invaders" (*EXP*).⁴⁷

In order for justice to prevail, God must implement the covenant curses for the people to see their problems. In the Book of Judges, Israel stands on the verge of extinction several times. We see political disunity, infighting, external invasions, and spiritual and moral depravity. The people all fall back into familiar patterns of sins.⁴⁸ There is a great deal of intermingling and co-mingling between Israel and its neighbors. Ultimately we see that God is faithful, even though He has to frequently take His people to the brink of disaster.⁴⁹

Many evangelical Christians today have used the Book of Judges to preach on how societies once committed to God will suffer His judgment if they do not repent. Judges certainly does show us what will happen when one compromises with the world, and clearly epitomizes much of the fallen human condition. "Every reader of the book learns that God is longsuffering and compassionate; every reader cannot but see aspects of his or her own life refracted in the characters of the narrative" (Dillard and Longman).⁵⁰ It shows that repentance and restoration are always available for the individuals who want it, and each generation must choose to consciously follow the Lord. Many of the characters in Judges are viewed by the author of Hebrews as great examples of faith (Hebrews 11:32-33).

When we look back at Judges today as Believers in Yeshua, we see examples of how powerless many of the people were without the Spirit of God. With only the Mosaic Law to largely guide them, they were unable to remain in right standing with God. The Spirit of God was principally only available to the judges and a select few. Believers today can learn the warnings that Judges gives us, and hopefully be all things—now with the Holy Spirit—that Ancient Israel was originally intended to be. The Book of Judges "is presented as a period

⁴⁴ Kraft, "Judges, Book of," in *IDB*, 2:1014; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 693-694; Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 3:1158-1159; Dillard and Longman, 123.

⁴⁵ Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:380.

⁴⁶ Boling, "Judges, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:1107.

⁴⁷ Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:378.

⁴⁸ Wolf, in *EXP*, 3:376; Dillard and Longman, pp 124-125.

⁴⁹ Fensham, "Judges, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:1159; *EXP*, 3:378; Dillard and Longman, 127.

⁵⁰ Dillard and Longman, 119.

during which the nation was being fashioned by its God in the furnace of affliction to be His chosen instrument for the furtherance of His purpose in the world” (Bruce, *NBCR*).⁵¹

Today, for whatever reason, not many Messianics choose to examine or study the Book of Judges. For those who study the Torah consistently, is it legitimate to ask whether or not the message of Deuteronomy affects the message of Judges? We cannot know this if we do not go beyond the Torah. Perhaps there are some in the Messianic movement who do not wish to examine Judges because it depicts the rebelliousness of Israel once they subdue Canaan. The harsh realities of Israel’s problems are admittedly difficult for some to acknowledge who may have romantic ideas about Israel in the Promised Land.

The Book of Judges, in no uncertain terms, depicts Israel at its worst. Israel forgets its covenant relationship and responsibilities to God. The challenges Judges presents to us as the emerging Messianic movement are whether or not we will forget the responsibilities that God has given us today, and how we will live out those responsibilities with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It also challenges us to do more historically conscious studies of the Scriptures, and some of the criticisms present against the Bible. Judges is a text that should force not only individuals, but the entire Body of Messiah, to become self-critical. How do we hold ourselves to God’s standard and (not) allow ourselves to be chastised—in order to be properly used by Him?

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON JUDGES:

1. What is the single, most important issue that seems to repeat itself throughout the Book of Judges?

⁵¹ Bruce, in *NBCR*, 254.

2. How significant do you believe it is that Deborah, a woman, served as a judge over Israel?

3. Summarize the important aspects of Gideon's service to Israel.

4. What do you think is to be learned from the example of Abimelech?

5. Summarize the important aspects of Samson's service to Israel.

6. Is there any scene in Judges that strikes you as significant, intriguing, or odd?

7. What lessons might today's Messianic community learn by listening to the message of Judges?

REFLECTION ON JUDGES' PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Judges: