

VISION FOR THE WORD OF GOD

JUDGES

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What is the Book of Judges: “The history of Israel between the death of Joshua and the rise of the prophet Samuel is the subject of the book of Judges.”¹ It is important to understand that the account is more religious than historical. For example if the totals of the years that the individual judges were said to have ruled were added up the figure would be around 480. The vast majority of scholars believe that this would have been too long of a period for the judges to rule. Judges can be looked upon as the struggle of the people of God to build, maintain and understand their faith as the twelve tribes sought to build themselves into a nation, finish the conquest of Canaan and fight off other neighboring hostile tribes.

Who were the judges? Unlike the modern English application of the word “judge” that is used to refer to people involved in the judicial process, the Hebrew use of the term judge also means to rule. The judges then were essentially indigenous leaders and rulers who arose to give direction, stability and guidance to the people of Israel, often in times of crisis. They were not all of the same ilk. Some were charismatic military leaders that gave direction to all of the tribes, while others seem to have been administrative rulers and leaders of individual tribes. Their personalities range from bland to colorful and controversial.

How and when was book of Judges composed? It is believed that the first literary forms for some of them were songs or ballads that were passed down while others were written narratives. It is believed that these various songs, stories and narratives were pulled together and compiled into the book of Judges as we presently have it, in the times of Hezekiah (8th century), Josiah (7th century) and after the exile of Judah (6th-5th centuries). The vast majority of scholars believe that the book of Judges is part of a single work known as the Deuteronomic history that includes Joshua, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings (Ruth is excluded).

How is Judges structured and who were these indigenous leaders?

Chapters 1-2: Transition from leadership of Joshua to the need for other leaders

The Judges:

Othniel, tribe of Judah (3: 7-11)

Ehud, tribe of Benjamin (3: 12-30)

Shamgar, tribe of Levi (3: 31)

Deborah and Barak, tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (4:1-5: 31)

Gideon, tribe of Manasseh (6:1-8: 32)

Tola, tribe of Issachar (10: 1-2)

Jair, tribe of Gilead (10: 6-12: 7)

¹ The Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary on the Bible, p. 135

Jephthah, tribe of Gilead (10: 6-12: 7)

Ibzan, tribe of Judah (12: 8-10)

Elon, tribe of Zebulun (12: 11-12)

Abdon, tribe of Ephraim, (12: 13-15)

Samson, tribe of Dan, (13: 1-16: 31)

Epilogue:

Micah's Idolatry and the Danites (17: 1-18: 31)

Crime at Gibeah and War against Benjamin (19: 1-21: 25)

Lessons from Judges:

Whether we are talking about an individual, a nation or a system or organization of believers, the development of faith is never a perfect journey. The development of faith consists of progress and regression, of conquests and failures, of revival and backsliding, of correcting and discerning and sometimes misreading the word and will of God.

One of the hardest challenges is remaining faithful during good times. One of the hardest challenges in our walk with the Lord is to move from a crisis mode to consistency in our walk with the Lord.

God loves us and is faithful during all of our efforts to make it through life's meandering and uneven journey.

No religious believer can be trusted to follow his or her own revelation or word from the Lord without being accountable and regulated by a larger faith community. Anytime someone is doing what is right in their own eyes, confusion and trouble will inevitably be the result. We must always pray Psalm 139: 23-24.