

JUDGES

LITERARY TYPE: Historical Narrative

AUTHOR: The author is unknown. Samuel has been suggested as he is considered to be the last judge (1 Samuel 7:6) and he may have compiled the records of all the judges.

DATE: The events recorded in the book occur from just after the death of Joshua until the beginning of the monarchy, a period of 335 years (suggested dating is 1380-1045BC). However, the quote 'in those days Israel had no king' suggests that the book was written during the monarchy, which began approximately 1020BC.

RECIPIENTS: The Israelites.

OCCASION: The Israelites are now settled in the Promised Land but have compromised on God's command, by not eradicating the Canaanites, intermarrying with them and accepting their foreign gods. They have also committed apostasy – turning from worshipping the LORD to worshipping idols. These problems lead God to allow Israel to be subdued by the nations they failed to destroy. The people then cry out to God for deliverance, which He does by raising up a series of judges that would defeat their enemies. Once there is peace in the land, the people of Israel return to their sinful ways and the pattern repeats. Israel becomes more morally corrupt as the downward spiral is repeated.

The book shows that:

- the external threat of other nations is not as serious as the internal threat of moral depravity and idolatry.
- human kingship had become necessary for the nation as they were unable to follow God as their King.

CONTENT SURVEY:

Part One: The Military Failure of Israel (1:1 – 3:6)

- Incomplete conquest of the land (1:1 – 2:5)
- Disobedience and defeat (2:6 – 3:6)

Part Two: The Rescue of Israel by the Judges (3:7 – 16:31)

- Othniel (3:7 – 3:11)
- Ehud and Shamgar (3:12 – 3:31)
- Deborah and Barak (4 – 5)
- Gideon (6 – 8)
- Abimelech's murderous reign (9)
- Tola and Jair (10:1 – 10:5)
- The Ammonites oppress Israel (10:6 – 10:18)
- Jephthah's triumph and tragedy (11:1 – 12:7)
- Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12:8 – 12:15)
- Samson (13 – 16)

Part Three: The Moral Failure of Israel (17:1 – 21:25)

- Idolatry in the tribe of Dan (17 – 18)
- War against the tribe of Benjamin (19 – 21)

KEY VERSE:

Judges 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Sources: Willmington's Bible Handbook and SOTW lectures