

Judges Outline

Introduction: Although in the Deuteronomistic history the book of Judges picks up the story after the death of Joshua, historians see Judges as offering a second perspective on the period of conquest. While in Joshua the Israelite conquest of Palestine is swift and uncomplicated, in Judges the picture is far muddier. The main story line in the book of Judges is tribal factionalism among the Israelites, only finding unity when God raises up a charismatic spiritual and military leader known as a judge. In Judges we see that conquering the Holy Land was one thing- keeping the peace in it was quite another matter altogether. In the end Judges paints such a bleak picture of Israel in order to prepare the way for First Samuel and the rise of monarchy as the only possible way to govern such a difficult people.

At moments like this it is extremely helpful to compare the order of the Hebrew Bible with the Christian Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible the book of Judges flows directly into First Samuel, making a direct comparison between the chaotic time of judges versus the triumphant time of the great kings. The Christian Old Testament, wanting to place a greater emphasis on historical continuity, interrupts the original order inserting Ruth in between Judges and First Samuel. It's not that the Christians were wrong to reorder this material- but it's plain to see how sometimes the way the books are ordered affect the way reading communities hear and interpret them.

Section One: Early Judges

- Chapter 1: After death of Joshua the failure of the tribes to drive out the people of the land
- Chapter 2: Israel worships Baal, God raises up judges
- Chapter 3: Othniel as model judge; Ehud and King Eglon, Shamgar
- Chapter 4: Deborah and General Barak; Jael and Sisera
- Chapter 5: Song of Deborah

Section Two: Gideon Cycle

- Chapter 6: Gideon/Jerubabab
- Chapter 7: Gideon takes the Midianites
- Chapter 8: Israel asks Gideon to be king- he refuses
- Chapter 9: Abimelech, Jotham; Abimelech's wars and death
- Chapter 10: More judges and more backsliding
- Chapter 11: Jephthah's defeat of the Ammonites, but the sacrifice of his daughter
- Chapter 12: Civil war between Ephraim against Jephthah in Gilead; Shibboleth custom

Section Three: Samson Cycle

- Chapter 13: Manoah and wife, childless, angelic pronouncement; Nazirite vow
- Chapter 14: Samson; Philistine wife and the riddle
- Chapter 15: Samson kills a thousand with the jawbone of an ass
- Chapter 16: Samson and Delilah

Section Four: Chaos with No King

- Chapter 17: Micah establishes new altar- no king
- Chapter 18: Danites steal Micah's priest and destroy town- no king
- Chapter 19: The rape of the Levite's concubine
- Chapter 20: War against Benjamin; fall of Gibeah and Benjamin
- Chapter 21: Settling against Benjamin

Texts to know: Deborah and Jael (Chapter 4:1-24); Gideon's defeat of the Midianites (7:12-23); Samson and Delilah (Chapter 16:1-31)