

Judges

1. Summary – Judges describes the period after the death of Joshua before the establishment of a king in Israel. When the people fail to drive out the Canaanites, they increasingly fall into the sins of the nations around them and then fall under the oppression of those peoples as a judgment from God. God then repeatedly and mercifully raises up “judges,” or local military leaders, who lead the people to throw off their oppressors and enjoy peace. However, the people continue to spiral downward into idolatry and disunity. They need a king to lead them.
2. Author and date – The author of Judges is not explicitly stated in the book. Traditionally, the book was attributed to Samuel, since he was the last of the judges (1 Sam. 7:15) but also lived to see the establishment of the monarchy. The monarchy was clearly in place at the time Judges was written. (Jud. 21:25 “ In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”) A comparison of Judges 1:21 with 2 Sam. 5:6-10 suggests that the book was completed before David took Jerusalem. It seems evident that a primary purpose of the author was to make the case that the kingship, particularly of David, was legitimate and necessary and established by God’s blessing to help Israel in her weakness.
3. Structure of the book:
 - a. Introduction:
 - i. Initial success in driving out Canaanites (1:1-15)
 - ii. Failure to complete the mission from the people’s perspective (1:16-36)
 - iii. Failure to complete the mission described, judged, and summarized from God’s perspective (2:1-3:6)
 - b. The failure of Israel and God’s justice and mercy—we see a downward spiral that follows a recurring pattern (3:7-16:31). Each time, it seems that the sin grows worse, and the character of the judge is more and more flawed. The spiral pattern is:
 - i. Israel does evil in the eyes of the Lord – usually idolatry and intermarriage with the pagan nations.
 - ii. God’s anger is kindled, and he gives the people over to foreign oppressors. They are unable to drive out the foreigners, and they become subject to them.
 - iii. At some point in their oppressed state, Israel cries out to the Lord.
 - iv. The Lord hears their cry and raises up a deliverer in the form of a judge.
 - v. The enemy is thrown off, and Israel enjoys peace for awhile, until the death and burial of the judge.
 - c. The people grow more and more like the nations around them and less and less unified until they are at war with themselves. (ch. 17-21)
4. Major themes and events:
 - a. The judges and those they rule are deeply flawed individuals. (“The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1) Gideon is reluctant to answer God’s call and is something of a coward and a skeptic. After he wins the battle, he makes an ephod that leads the people into false worship. The presence of a female judge (Deborah) underscores the lack of strong male leadership on the part of Barak. Jephthah demonstrates self-interest in his negotiation to become a ruler. He makes a rash vow that costs his daughter her life. Samson is full of self-indulgence and becomes entangled by foreign women.
 - b. In spite of their flaws, Scripture views them as believing people who “through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises” (Heb. 11:32-33). They are part of the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1-12) that call us to persevere and fix our eyes on Jesus.
 - c. The tension between grace and law, conditional and unconditional blessing continues from previous books and is heightened in Judges. God will not forsake his people, but they must trust and obey him. How will this tension be resolved? This points us forward in redemptive history. The provision of a king foreshadows how God will ultimately resolve this tension.