

Background Information for the Judges

After the death of Joshua, the Hebrew nation had no central government. Each tribe had its own portion of Canaan and they governed themselves. Now the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle were moved around from place to place among the tribes.

Although Israel had conquered the Land of Canaan, there were still communities of Canaanites living in places throughout the land. Israelites began to adopt practices of these Canaanite communities and began to intermarry with the unbelievers. Over time they began to even worship Canaanite gods instead of the Lord ([Judges 3:5-7](#)).

The Lord had promised His protection for an obedient Israel. During this time, the Israelites were taught over and over that when they turn away from God—He stopped protecting them and allowed bad things to happen to them. There is a repeating cycle which runs throughout the book of Judges:

1. Israel follows God and prospers.
2. Israel begins to drift away from God more and more until the people begin to forget Him.
3. The Lord allows the surrounding nations to conquer and persecute His people.
4. The suffering people realize their mistake and ask God to save them.
5. The Lord sends a JUDGE to save the people.
6. The cycle repeats.

This time in bible history is sometimes confusing. The “good guys” aren’t always good and the “bad guys” sometimes do the right thing. It was, in some ways, a wild time. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” ([Judges 21:25](#)). The stories are often harsh and sometimes difficult for us to understand. Heroes of the Jewish nation were not always upright, spiritual leaders. The heroes were simply the individuals whom God empowered to get the job done in protecting and gathering together His people.

These heroic figures—judges—were blessed by God. Each judge did not “reign over” all of the people as a king would. Judges often only acted for the benefit of a few tribes, some were military leaders (Gideon and Jephthah). Others were spiritual examples (Deborah), while others (like Samson) were simply a symbol of God’s strength and power to the surrounding nations.

The last judge, Samuel, was promised to the Lord’s service by his mother even before he was conceived. He served under the priest, Eli, in the Tabernacle of the Lord. Samuel served in the transitional time between the judges and the time of the Kings (coming up next term). Samuel was a judge, a prophet, and a priest. He served God all of his life.

The story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, took place during the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1).

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Judge	Scripture (Book of Judges)
<i>Othniel</i>	3:7-11
<i>Ehud</i>	3:12-30
<i>Shamgar</i>	3:31
<i>Deborah</i>	chapters 4-5
<i>Gideon</i>	chapters 6-8
<i>Tola</i>	10:1-2
<i>Jair</i>	10:3-5
<i>Jephthah</i>	10:6-12:7
<i>Ibzan</i>	12:8-10
<i>Elon</i>	12:11-12
<i>Abdon</i>	12:13-15
<i>Samson</i>	chapters 13-16
<i>Samuel</i>	1 Samuel 1-25:1

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