

The Book of Judges

Prologue (1:1-3:7) - Deterioration		Introduction to the Period of the Judges		
This section introduces the problem to which the rest of the book may be traced: a failure to drive out the heathen as instructed by God. The book is summarized in 2:16-19. This introduces the predictable pattern found in the book: sin and rebellion, servitude and ruin, supplication and repentance, salvation and restoration, and repetition.				
History (3:8-16:31) - Deliverance		Information on the Period of the Judges		
This section is in chronological order and covers the cycle of seven apostasies and deliverances at the hands of thirteen named judges. These seven cycles are overviewed below.				
Passage	Oppressors	Servitude	Judge(s)	Judgeship/Rest
3:8-11	Mesopotamia	8 years (3:8)	Othniel	40 years (v. 11)
Othniel was the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, winning Caleb's daughters hand in marriage through his bravery (v. 10).				
3:12-30	Moabites	18 years (3:14)	Ehud	80 years (v. 30)
Ehud was selected to deliver Israel's tribute and used the opportunity to slay the king of Moab, Eglon (v. 16, 22). After the assassination of the Moabite king, Ehud raised an army that slew 10,000 Moabites (v. 29). The death of Eglon by a two-edged sword that caused the dirt to come out provides a picture of the way in which the word of God serves to purge us of the influence of the world.				
3:31	Philistines		Shamgar	
4:1-5:31	Canaanites	20 years (4:3)	Deborah/Barak	40 years (5:31)
Deborah's judgeship is evidence of the degeneration of the social order (Isaiah 3:12), particularly in view of her having to coax Barak to go to war, and then having to accompany him. Nevertheless, she wanted to be remembered as "a mother in Israel" (5:7) and he appears in the roll call of faith in Hebrews 11:32. The song of chapter 5 provides a picture of the Second Advent (see 5:10, 19, 20, 26).				
6:1-8:32	Midianites	7 years (6:1)	Gideon	40 years (8:28)
Gideon is called after a prophet is sent (6:7-10), and his first task was to confront the idolatry in his father's house (6:25ff.). Gideon manages to gather an army which God proceeds to whittle down to a tiny force of 300. This small band routed a force of 135,000 with pitchers lamps, and trumpets (7:19ff). While Gideon refuses the offer to make him king, he takes an offering of the spoils and makes an image out of the offering which became a snare to Israel (8:27).				

9:1-57	Usurpation of Abimelech	3 years (9:22)		
Abimelech was the illegitimate son of Gideon who came to power by murdering his seventy half brothers. He reaped what he sowed in his violence and deception and was himself killed after a woman dropped a millstone upon his head at the tower of Shechem.				
10:1-2			Tola	23 years (10:2)
10:3-5			Jair	22 years (10:3)
10:6-12:7	Ammonites	18 years (10:8)	Jephthah	6 years (12:7)
Jephthah was the son of a harlot, but he had developed many good qualities as a leader, including a thorough grasp of his people's history (11:15-27). While Jephthah won a great victory, he lost his only daughter owing to a rash vow (11:30, 34ff). Following the victory, envy among the Ephraimites and the Gileadites led to a civil war which brought about the death of 42,000 Ephraimites (12:6).				
12:8-10			Ibzan	7 years (12:9)
12:11-12			Elon	10 years (12:11)
12:13-15			Abdon	8 years (12:14)
13:1-16:31	Philistines	40 years (13:1)	Samson	[20 years (16:31)]
A Nazarite from birth, Samson was endowed with supernatural strength, but virtually no self-control. He was especially subject to lust, which proved to be his downfall. While a good portion of the book is dedicated to Samson's exploits, he never did succeed in breaking the yoke of the Philistines. He still shows up in Hebrews 11 having killed more Philistines in his death than he had in his life.				
Appendix (17-21) - Depravity		Illustration of the Period of the Judges		
These chapters probably occur between the judgeships of Othniel and Ehud. They serve to illustrate the extent of the national apostasy that occurred during the period of the judges, including domestic failure (chapter 17), religious failure (chapter 18), moral failure (chapter 19), and political failure (chapter 20-21). This disastrous apostasy is traceable to an absence of authority and a rejection of the law of God (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25).				