

14 JUDGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

JUDGES OF ISRAEL

- DEBORAH
- GIDEON
- JEPHTHAH
- SAMSON
- ELI
- SAMUEL
- AND 8 OTHER JUDGES

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JUDGES OF ISRAEL

They weren't what anyone would call *conventional* leaders. One had a violent temper. One was the son of a prostitute. One was a woman in a male-dominated society. Another was a neglectful father. But they were also courageous, shrewd, relentless, and passionate seekers of the Lord. The Bible calls them *judges*. They were God's deliverers, chosen to liberate his people from oppression and bring his people back into a right relationship with him.

There are many lessons that can be taken from the judges, but perhaps the most important for us today is that no matter how often or how far we stray, God always provides a way for us to be reconciled with him. God does not give up on those who belong to him.

AN ERA OF TURMOIL

After Moses' death, Joshua completed the journey of leading God's people into the Promised Land. Over time, Joshua and all of the generation of people who had seen God's great works in securing the land passed away. This left God's people, for the first time, without a single, central leader.

The Israelites repeatedly fell into idolatry, worshiping the false gods of neighboring nations. In response, God allowed various enemies to oppress them. It was a brutal time of war with outside enemies and internal strife among the tribes. The Bible describes this period as being void of spiritual leadership: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 17:6). Indeed, the book of Judges showcases the corruption of humankind through some of the most violent stories in the Bible.

After a period of oppression, the Israelites would reach a breaking point where they would cry out for God to save them. In his time and love, God would raise up deliverers—called judges—to rescue his people. This era of the judges—and the cycle of turning from God, being defeated, crying out to God, and being delivered—lasted more than 300 years until the first king of Israel was put in place.

	JUDGE	MEANING OF NAME	SCRIPTURE
1	Othniel <i>The First Judge</i>	Lion of God	Judges 3:7–11 (1:12–14)
2	Ehud <i>The Left-Handed Judge</i>	Strong	Judges 3:12–30
3	Shamgar <i>The One-Verse Judge</i>	Cupbearer	Judges 3:31
4	Deborah <i>The Female Judge</i>	Bee	Judges 4:1–5:31
5	Gideon <i>The Valiant Judge</i>	A cutting down	Judges 6:1–8:32
6	Tola <i>The Hill Country Judge</i>	Scarlet	Judges 10:1–2
7	Jair <i>The “30” Judge</i>	The Lord enlightens	Judges 10:3–5
8	Jephthah <i>The Vowing Judge</i>	He opens	Judges 10:6–12:7
9	Ibzan <i>The Marrying Judge</i>	Splendid	Judges 12:8–10
10	Elon <i>The Decade-long Judge</i>	Oak	Judges 12:11–12
11	Abdon <i>The Grandfather Judge</i>	Service	Judges 12:13–15
12	Samson <i>The Foolish Judge</i>	Distinguished / Sun	Judges 13:1–16:31
13	Eli <i>The Neglectful Judge</i>	Exalted is the Lord	1 Samuel 1:1–4:18
14	Samuel <i>The Transitional Judge</i>	Heard of God	1 Samuel 1; 3; 7–13; 15–16; 25:1; 28

*Years of Oppression is the time period when God allowed the Israelites to be overpowered by their enemies oppressors and bring peace to the land. (See the Cycle Pattern on page 5.)

TRIBE	ENEMY	YEARS OF OPPRESSION*	YEARS OF SERVICE/PEACE*
Judah	Mesopotamians	8	40
Benjamin	Moabites	18	80
Unknown	Philistines	Unknown	Unknown
Ephraim	Canaanites	20	40
Manasseh	Midianites	7	40
Issachar	Unknown	Unknown	23
Manasseh	Unknown	Unknown	22
Manasseh	Philistines and Ammonites	18	6
Judah	Unknown	Unknown	7
Zebulun	Unknown	Unknown	10
Ephraim	Unknown	Unknown	8
Dan	Philistines	40	20
Levi	Family strife	Unknown	40
Levi	National strife	Unknown	Possibly 40

Years of Service/Peace is the time period when God raised up a judge to lead the Israelites to defeat their