

JUDGES & RUTH

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I. INTRODUCTION: ISRAEL HAS BROKEN THE COVENANT OF COMPLETE CONQUEST (1:1-3:6)

1. 2nd Generation (Judges 1:1-2:5)
 2nd Generation conquers Canaan, Joshua dies (1:1-26)
 but fails to conquer all of Canaan (1:27-36L)
 ❶ angel rebukes disobedience, lesser covenant (2:1-5)
 Judah portrayed more favorably than Ephraim

2. 3rd Generation (2:6-3:6)
 general faithfulness of 2nd Generation, Joshua dies (2:6-10)
 idolatry of 3rd Generation, judges for the Pattern (2:10-19)
 ❷ Lord rebukes disobedience, lesser covenant (2:20-3:6)
 (1st Generation is those who wandered 40 yrs with Moses)

II. DEVELOPMENT: ISRAEL DELIVERED FROM FOREIGN DESTRUCTION BUT SPIRALS INTO APOSTASY (3:6-16:31L)

The Pattern: Othniel (3:6-11)

wickedness - captivity - cry to the Lord - deliverance - rest for 40 years

3. Ehud (3:12-30)
 stabs fat foreign king and the sword won't come out
 escapes while guards think the dead king is just sleeping
 Ephraim joins in the fight
 Pattern: rest is doubled to 80 years

4. Deborah / Barak / Jael (4:1-5:31L)
 Barak slow to trust, will fight only if Deborah goes too
 foreign general flees, Jael pounds stake in head while sleep
 Israel-allied woman kills foreign general – Israel is strong
 chapters 4 and 5 uniquely complement each other

❸ Israel cries to the Lord, a prophet tells Israel to trust in the Lord (6:6-10)

5. Gideon (6:11-8:35L)
 sends the scared home, then reduces army to only 300
 pretends to be a large force at night with lanterns and horns
 refuses to be “king,” says neither he nor his sons will rule
 is tribe of Manasseh (later, Northern kings also from Joseph)
 takes vengeance on foreigners who will not feed his army
 tactfully responds to Ephraim when not invited to fight
 slow to trust sign of deliverance – Messianic sheep's fleece
 begins with two sacrifices, angel, but ends with golden ephod

6. Abimelech / Schechem / Jotham (9:1-57L)
 Abimelech is Gideon's son, only one by a concubine
 plots with town of Schechem to kill brothers, becomes king
 never fights foreigners, only Israelites for power
 Israelite woman mortally wounds Israelite king
 like Israel, Schechem faithlessly turns upon its deliverer, then
 its new ally, and finally is destroyed
 Pattern: is not even mentioned, this story is different – is
 about Jotham's curse on Schechem / parable of bramble

❹ Israel cries to the Lord, who says he will not deliver, they then put away idols and he does deliver (10:6-16)

7. Jephthah (10:17-12:7) – Ammonites per 10:7
 son of a harlot, leads an armed band of outcasts
 is a series of deals – becomes “head” of the people
 defeats foreigners who will not let his army pass
 offends Ephraim when not invited to fight – intertribal war
 vows to sacrifice what meets him first when returning home
 Pattern: deliverance but no rest – sad death of only
 daughter

8. Samson (13:1-16:31L) – Philistines per 10:7
 foreign woman conquers Israelite hero – Israel is now weak
 only child's birth announced by angel, twice
 > 13 & 16:21-31L / 14 & 16:1-20 / 15 “Knowest thou not...?!”
 never fights foreigners to deliver, only to satisfy passions
 like Israel, set apart to deliver, but breaks all Nazarite vows
 Pattern: no repentance, no deliverance, no rest

III. CONCLUSION: ISRAEL HAS BROKEN ALL COVENANTS AND IS SELF-DESTRUCTING (17:1-21:25LL)

every single one of the 10 commandments is violated in these two stories
 wonderment at Israel's self-destruction (21:3) is resolved with more self-destruction

9. Tribe of Dan (17:1-18:31L)
 entire tribe (army of 600) leaves inheritance, worships idol
 so bad because no king in Israel, twice
 Levite travels from Bethlehem to Judah, finale at Shiloh
 1100 pieces of silver recalls price for Samson of Dan
 individual theft and idolatry repeated by whole tribe of Dan
 people want: money, position, land – security not from God
 3rd Generation grandson of lawgiver Moses leads apostasy

10. Tribe of Benjamin (19:1-21:25LL)
 entire tribe (all but 600 men) destroyed by other tribes
 so bad because no king in Israel, twice
 Levite travels from Judah to Bethlehem, finale at Shiloh
 description of wickedness recalls Sodom
 rape and murder of individual at Gibeah repeated against
 Benjamin and Jabesh-Gilead (Saul groups) by all Israel
 3rd Generation grandson of Aaron lead attack on Benjamin

12 judges: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola,
 Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Adbon, Samson
 “all the people” lament together only in 2:4 and 20:26, both
 times at Bethlehem (probably same place as Bochim)

Ruth (Ruth 1:1-4:22LL)
 faithfulness is blessed, even when most people are faithless,
 even for non-Israelites, even for the land as famine ends
 salvation at Bethlehem in contrast to Dan & Benjamin

The Book of Judges can be understood as explaining: (1) why the Israelites failed to finish conquering Canaan despite a promising start under Joshua; (2) why Israel needed a king despite Gideon's refusal of that position; and (3) that an Israelite king should be descended from David of Judah, not from Joseph (Manasseh or Ephraim) as in the Northern Kingdom, and not even from Saul of Gibeah in Benjamin. These answers are not wrong, but there is more.

The Book of Judges also sets forth and illustrates the new, lesser covenant established by the Lord between himself and Israel. In Genesis 17:8, Exodus 34:10-17, Deuteronomy 7:1-5 the Lord promised to give all of the land of Canaan to the Israelites. But the Lord also established conditions that the Israelites were to: (1) not make any alliances with the Canaanites, (2) throw down their heathen altars, and (3) not intermarry with them. In Judges 2:2 Israel is rebuked for violating the first two conditions, and in Judges 3:6 the Israelites are reported to violate the third condition. In Judges 2:1-5 and 2:20-3:4 the Lord therefore declares that the covenant under which he would deliver the entire land of Canaan to the Israelites has been broken, and in its place he declares that foreign nations will be left in Canaan to prove his people Israel and to be thorns in their sides. The former covenant will not be restored until the time of King David.

The Book of Judges is also about how Israel gets from Deborah, in which Israel is shown to be so strong that an allied woman can slay a foreign general, to Samson, in which Israel is now so weak that a foreign woman can defeat Israel's greatest physical hero. The turning point appears to be Gideon's final recorded act in making a golden ephod. Significantly, this is the first reported act by an Israelite leader to turn the people toward idolatry. Previously the people had often fallen into idolatry, and leaders were sometimes slow to trust the Lord, but those leaders were also consistently portrayed as faithful and able to each deliver 40 years of rest. The account of Gideon's ephod is also followed by 40 years of rest, but it is the last rest that Israel will enjoy.

The account of Gideon's ephod is immediately followed by the story of Abimelech and the town of Shechem, which illustrates Israel's turning away from the Lord who has repeatedly delivered them. The many obvious parallels between the stories of Gideon and Jephthah show that Abimelech is the central story of Judges (to the extent that there is one). The next story is of Jephthah, who is able to defeat the Ammonites but not to deliver rest. And the last story of the group is of Samson, who does not even pretend to lead. The Samson story illustrates Israel's failure to keep its covenants and to be an example to the nations as enjoined in Deuteronomy 4:6-8. The apparent lesson is that, although the people may have been idolatrous, they could be delivered by a strong righteous leader, but deliverance and rest become impossible when the leaders actually incite sin. Also see references to the Pattern on the other page.

It is likely that Judges covers about 250-300 years between about 1350-1300 BC to 1050 BC. Judges recounts a little more than 400 years of history, but some of the judges were probably regional and concurrent with each other, so that many years are counted twice. Judges also ends with two stories in which grandsons of Moses and Aaron figure prominently, but those two men would likely have been dead by the end of this time period. So the material in Judges has probably been arranged out of strict chronological order in order to make clear the lessons that its author sought to teach. The judgeships of Eli and Samuel occur after the end of Judges.

The Talmud states that both Judges and Ruth were written by Samuel. The Talmud also refers to the two final stories of Judges regarding Dan and Benjamin, plus the story of Ruth, as the Bethlehem Trilogy. While Judges may not have been written with Ruth in mind, it appears that Ruth was written with the stories of Dan and Benjamin in mind, and that it should therefore be read in light of the Book of Judges. The story of Ruth may have occurred about the same time as Gideon since she is the great grandmother of King David.