

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
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The Book of Judges presents the picture of a nation called the people of Yahweh but seemingly determined to negate that appellation if not destroy itself. But the Lord will not let this happen. He has chosen them to be his agents of light and life to the world; he has rescued them from Egypt; he has entered into an eternal covenant with them; and he has delivered the land of Canaan into their hands as an eternal possession. In the final analysis, God cannot let his program abort. The mission of grace to the world depends upon the preservation of his people. So against all odds, and certainly against Israel's deserts, the nation survives the dark days of the judges. The true hero in the book is God and God alone.

—Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 72.

OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

Judges

I. Titles

A. **Hebrew Title:** *Šōpētîm*, traditionally translated as “Judges”

B. **Greek/English Title:** Judges

C. The traditional title “Judges” is especially misleading for a number of reasons:¹

1. Even though the term *šōpētîm* is traditionally rendered “judges” in English, it’s curious that the term is never applied specifically to any of the figures in the book. Instead, Jephthah uses the term in reference to Yahweh (11:27), and the term is applied only in a general sense to these individuals in the book’s introduction in 2:16-19.
2. The root verb “to judge” is not used in the two main sections (1:1-2:2:5; 17:21-21:25) that frame the narratives of the judges’ activity.
3. The book doesn’t cover the entire history of Israel’s “judges.” Rather, the root verb “to judge” also appears in the Book of Samuel, indicating that the period of the Judges extends beyond the close of the book.
4. The purpose of these “judges” is outlined in 2:16-19:
 - a. Their authority and power came from Yahweh

¹ See Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 21-25

- b. Their purpose was salvific rather than judicial.
 - c. They delivered from external enemies, but did not necessarily provide judgment of internal affairs within the nation.
- D. The title “Saviors” or “Deliverers” provides a better understanding of the point of the book.
 - 1. After all, each individual is specifically said to be a “deliverer”, though no individual is specifically referred to as a “judge.”
 - 2. The reason for the misleading title is because the root term שפח [špḥ] has a broader semantic range than simply “to judge.” Instead, the root verb carries the sense of “to rule or govern,” or “to exercise leadership.” When applied in a judicial sense (i.e., dealing with internal affairs within a nation), it can mean “to rule/govern by judging.” But when used of leadership or governance in relation to the external affairs of a nation, the term means “to rule/lead through deliverance”.
 - 3. Thus, in the book of Judges, Yahweh is the only true “Judge” who deals with the internal affairs of Israel by providing “deliverers” to liberate the nation from the external forces that frequently oppressed them.

II. Date of Events

- A. The book picks up at the close of the events of Joshua and covers a period roughly from the death of Joshua (1390 B.C.) to the death of Samson (1084 B.C.).
- B. However, the oft-repeated refrain, “In those days Israel had no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) suggest that this period extends up to the time of Eli and Samuel, if not to the coronation of Saul around 1051 B.C.
- C. As with the book of Joshua, the phrase, “to this day” appears strategically (1:21; 6:24; 10:4; 15:19), signaling the continuing impact of the events of the book and reminding the reader that very often what happens in one generation has a lasting impact on future generations.

III. Major Themes

A. The Incomplete Obedience of Israel

- 1. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a literary bridge between the book of Joshua and the book of Judges by narrating a series of campaigns showing that the apostasy that characterizes much of the book of Judges did not immediately follow Joshua’s death.
- 2. Instead, the apostasy was the result of incomplete obedience on the part of Israel.
 - a. Chapter 1 provides a military perspective on Israel’s incomplete obedience. Despite their victories, there is frequent note of military failure on the part of the tribes (1:19, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31-32, 33, 34-35). Judah heads up this list, with the most information given as to the reason for their failure—the iron chariots of the Canaanites became an excuse not to trust Yahweh and complete their military conquest. Thus, the Canaanites were often subjected to forced labor instead of eradicated as was God’s decree.

- b. Chapter 2 provides a spiritual perspective on Israel's incomplete obedience. Here, Israel is portrayed as unfaithful to her covenant with Yahweh (2:1-5). Rather than living in faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant, they entered into a covenant with the Canaanites (presumably the Gibeonites, cf. Josh 9) and failed to destroy the Canaanite altars.
- c. Chapter 2 also provides an explanation for why Israel could not drive out all the inhabitants of the land:
 - 1) The Canaanites would be used as an instrument to discipline Israel (2:3)
 - 2) The Canaanites would be used as a test of Israel's loyalty (2:21-22)
 - 3) The Canaanites would be used as a means of teaching Israel's new generations in warfare (3:1-2)

B. The Provocation and Protection of Yahweh

- 1. Chapter 2 describes how Israel repeatedly provoked Yahweh to anger through idolatry that resulted in their oppression at the hands of the Canaanite inhabitants (see Theme: "The Cycle" for detailed discussion). This oppression lasted anywhere from 8-40 years.
- 2. Yet despite this continued provocation, there is still a nation of Israel at the end of the book of Judges! Though the text never explicitly references it, the implication of Israel's existence despite their continual disobedience amounts to Yahweh's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant (Pss 105:8-15).
- 3. The basis for Yahweh providing deliverers for Israel throughout the period of the judges is not the Mosaic Covenant, but rather the Abrahamic Covenant. While their oppression was promised for disobedience through the former, their deliverance was a result of God's faithfulness to the latter (Ps 106:43-45).

C. The Cycle

- 1. Judges is a cyclical book which focuses on a repeated pattern in Israel's history that occurred in overlapping fashion throughout the nation in the period following the conquest of the land under Joshua.
- 2. Judges 2:11-3:6 introduces this cyclical pattern and structure's this 300+ year period of Israel's history:
 - a. **Israel's Sin** (2:11-13, 17; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 8:33; 10:6; 13:1)
 - 1) The book of Judges describes the Canaanization of Israel—this is what happens when the people of God begin to adopt the ways of the world.
 - 2) Life in the ANE was agrarian-based and the Canaanite worldview was exceedingly mythical. The forces of nature were perceived as expressions of divine presence, and thus survival and prosperity involved identifying which gods were responsible for these natural phenomena and encouraging them to produce through symbolic ritual.

- 3) The Canaanite pantheon contained a whole host of hierarchical gods. Asherah, for instance, was the mother goddess of fertility, whose presence and power were symbolized by evergreen trees (e.g., the “Asherah” or “Asherim” [meaning “groves”] often mentioned in the OT; see Deut 16:21 for an example).
- 4) By far the most predominant and influential god of the Canaanite pantheon was Baal (lit., “master”), who was the storm god (responsible for rain, thunder, and lightning). Thus, in an agrarian culture, he was the most important god for daily life and vitality.
- 5) He was also a very sensual god, and thus the rituals associated with Baal worship were grossly sexual in nature. In fact, as the storm god, rain was perceived as the divine semen falling down to impregnate the earth with life.
- 6) Though there was only one Baal, centralized worship was not required. Thus, Baal worship could happen at any number of locations and usually on hills (i.e., “high places” mentioned throughout the OT), and each region seemed to have their own Baal that they worshipped (i.e., Baal-Peor, Baal-Berith, Baal-Zebub, etc.)
- 7) The temptation to Baal worship should not be underestimated. The natural draw toward worshipping a god that could be seen (i.e., an idol carved in stone) at a convenient location (rather than at a centralized location) and that was associated with the kinds of natural phenomena that made life possible in the dry and arid land of Canaan (e.g., rain) was extremely enticing.
- 8) In addition to this, the draw of the sensual nature of Baal worship made this form of paganism virtually irresistible to Israel.
- 9) Merrill sums up the nature of Israel’s apostasy this way: “It was turning from Yahweh, the real source of prosperity and fertility, to the figment of depraved imaginations that confused the result of divine blessing with its cause. It was in every way an egregious act of covenant rebellion and disloyalty best described as ‘whoring after other gods’ (Judg. 2:17 KJV).”²
- 10) It is also important to remember that the Torah had already warned Israel of the impending consequences of idolatry (see Deut 7). Thus, the cycle of Judges should not have been a surprise to the nation.

b. Israel’s Servitude

- 1) Israel’s idolatry provoked Yahweh to anger. So he sent enemies to punish them through oppression that would last anywhere from 8 to 40 years.
- 2) As previously mentioned, this oppression was both retributive as well as disciplinary. As much as it was punishment for idolatry, it was also aimed at driving Israel back to Yahweh worship.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 180.

c. Israel's Supplication

- 1) When Israel's oppression reached the tipping point, the nation would finally call out to Yahweh for help, much like they did as slaves in Egypt. Only now, they were slaves in their own land!
- 2) The irony, of course, is that only through the chastisement of God do they turn to Yahweh as the true source of life, productivity, and vitality, the very things for which they had turned to Baal, who was the god of their oppressors!

d. Israel's Salvation

- 1) Despite Israel's idolatry and fickleness, Yahweh responds to their cries for help with compassion—a response centered in his faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Deut 7:7-9).
- 2) Salvation from oppression comes in the form of judges or, more accurately, deliverers who break the people free from their oppression.

e. Israel's Security

- 1) Once free, Israel enjoyed a time of security once again within their land.
 - 2) However, Israel refuses to follow their judges and returns to idolatry, reintroducing the cycle once again.
3. The cycle is the same throughout Judges 3-17; however, every time the cycle begins, the situation is worse than before.
 4. Each cycle spirals Israel down into worse idolatry, worse judgment, and more dramatic deliverance.
 5. But as the cycles continue, the quality of deliverers becomes poorer and poorer, since they too are influenced by the Canaanization of the people.
 6. Thus, the earlier judges exhibit far superior spiritual character than later judges. Because of this, each subsequent judge receives more narrative material because it takes more time to unpack their lack of spiritual fervor.
 7. Othniel, for example, appears to be a true man of faith, yet his narrative portion amounts to 3 verses (3:9-11). Samson, on the other hand, appears so poor in spiritual character that it is questionable whether he is truly a servant of Yahweh! Yet he receives the longest literary treatment of any judge (13:1-16:31).
 8. In summary, the cycles of the book demonstrate the spiritual fickleness of the nation and the effects of worldliness on God's people—even its leaders. While God provided deliverers, even they turned out to be less than spiritual models.

D. The Judges**1. The Background of the Judges**

- a. The concept of "judge" first appears in Exod 18, where the people were in need of judicial decisions and came to Moses, whose father-in-law advised that the people be taught the law and that able men be selected to judge these cases, leaving Moses to judge only on major disputes.

- b. Thus, judges began most likely as tribal leaders who operated under Moses and whose responsibility was to teach Israel the law and decide on legal matters.
 - c. By the time of the conquest and occupation, the responsibility of “judgeship” fell on the elders of the nation.
 - d. The “judges” of Israel served more as military leaders and protectors.
 - e. “In Israel in the era between the great covenant mediators (Moses and Joshua) and the kings, the judges served as ad hoc governors and generals entrusted with the task of delivering the people from the enemies who harassed them repeatedly throughout these centuries.”³
2. **The List of the Judges:**⁴ The judges are introduced in summary fashion in chapter 2. It is only here that they are called “judges” (i.e., deliverers). In each individual account, they are never referred to as a judge/deliverer.
- a. **Major/Primary Judges:** Called “major/primary” because of the amount of literary material dedicated to them, not because of their importance.
 - 1) ***Othniel*** (3:9-11)
 - Delivered Israel from a wide-scale oppression by Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram Naharaim.
 - His judgeship lasted 40 years. Most likely the nation fell into idolatry following Othniel’s death.
 - 2) ***Ehud*** (3:12-30)
 - Delivered Israel from an 18-year oppression that was localized around Jericho and inflicted by Eglon, king of Moab.
 - Approaching Eglon to offer tribute, he assassinated the Moabite king and annihilated the Moabite forces as they attempted to retreat to their homeland, releasing the people from Moabite oppression and giving them security in the region for 80 years.
 - 3) ***Deborah*** (4:1-5:31)
 - Delivered Israel from a 20-year oppression at the hands of Jabin, king of Hazor, who dominated the northern region of Israel above the Jezreel Valley with his fleet of 900 iron chariots.
 - Deborah was apparently a national judge whose administration was located between Ramah and Bethel. She encouraged Barak to engage Jabin on Mount Tabor, but he rightly refused, recognizing that Deborah was the anointed judge of Israel and thus symbolized Yahweh’s presence and power among the people.

³ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 181-2.

⁴ This overview of the judges is borrowed and adapted from Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*.

- Thus, she joined Barak in the north and they defeated Sisera, the commanding general of Jabin's forces, who fled to Kadesh where he was assassinated by a Kenite woman whose loyalty toward her Israelite kinsmen apparently overpowered her sense of Semitic hospitality.⁵
- Israel then enjoyed 40 years of security during Deborah's judgeship.
- Yet this episode reveals a lack of tribal unity among the nation at the time, for Deborah, though judge over all of Israel, was able to muster only 6 of the 12 tribes to participate in the combat against Jabin.

4) **Gideon** (6:1-8:35)

- Delivered central Israel from a particularly severe and violent oppression at the hands of Midianite invaders aided by Amalekite and other Canaanite forces that followed Deborah's 40-year judgeship.
- With only 300 men, Gideon confused and routed the Midianites in a sweeping victory that could only be attributed to Yahweh's powerful presence with him.
- With the help of the Ephraimites, the two Midianite chieftains were captured and executed, however, not without complaint that they should have been invited to participate in the initial assault.
- Yet despite this, Gideon received resistance toward receiving any kind of assistance for his famished troops on the grounds that he had not yet accomplished a complete victory over the enemy. Once again, regionalism was beginning to surface across the nation.
- Following the destruction of the Midianite forces at Qarqar and the execution of their kings, the people of his home town wished to make him king.
- Though Gideon rejected the offer, he allowed for a golden ephod to be made, which became an object of worship that "undermined much of what Gideon had achieved on behalf of Yahweh."⁶

5) **Jephthah** (11:1-12:7)

- Delivered Transjordan Israel (east of the Jordan River) from an 18-year Ammonite oppression.
- Having previously been exiled from Gilead, he was commissioned by the elders there to end the oppression.
- His first attempt was diplomatic—Ammon claimed that Israel had been illegally occupying their territory for 300 years.⁷ But Jephthah asked why

⁵ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 184.

⁶ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 188.

they were only now making this contention. Regardless, he clarified that at the time of the conquest, the Transjordan territory was under Amorite—not Ammonite—control.

- Nevertheless, Jephthah's diplomatic approach was rejected so he attacked and defeated them, returning to Mizpah to fulfill his earlier vow.
- Once again, Jephthah's military success garnered hostility from the Ephraimites, who approached Gilead to attack them, claiming they were excluded from participation in the fight, though they had suffered at the hands of the Ammonites.
- Jephthah reminded them that he had invited them to participate in the battle, but the invitation had been refused on the grounds that the Gileadites were disloyal to Israel—another indication of the fracturing of unity between tribes, especially in relation to those tribes who had requested inheritances across the Jordan River.
- Jephthah engaged the Ephraimites and defeated them, posting sentries at the fording places on the river and identifying the Ephraimites by their peculiar dialect—another indication of the growing disparity between regions.

6) **Samson** (13:1-16:31)

- Delivered south-central Israel (esp. Dan) from a 40-year Philistine oppression that occurred roughly concurrently with the Ammonite oppression of 11:1-12:7.
- Though born to godly parents and raised as a Nazirite, he exhibits perhaps the least spiritual character of all the judges. He shows little regard for moral purity or covenant loyalty, first marrying a Philistine woman, then engaging with a prostitute from Gaza, and finally falling in love with Delilah, who for pay revealed to the Philistines the source of his strength.
- Yet amid his spiritual deficiencies, he waged several significant blows against the Philistines.
- The first came when he was tricked to reveal the answer to a riddle at his wedding feast. To pay the wager—30 sets of clothes—he slaughtered 30 Philistine men in Ashkelon.
- When the Philistines retaliated by giving his wife to another man, he tied together 300 foxes in pairs by their tails and released them into the Philistine wheat fields in flames, burning down their crops.
- The Philistines then killed his wife and father-in-law, so Samson slaughtered a large number of them.

⁷ Jephthah's assertion of 300 years is important for dating the period of the judges, because it places a time marker from the date of the conquest (1406 B.C.). This is important in understanding the overlap of the oppressions that took place during this period.

- When the Philistines arrayed for battle against Judah, Samson was delivered over to the Philistines, who killed 1,000 of their men.
 - During his tryst with the prostitute in Gaza, the Philistines lay in ambush for him. But he laid hold of the city gates and carried them forty miles to Hebron.
 - Finally, after his betrayal by Delilah, and when his hair had finally grow back, he pulled down the supporting pillars of the temple of Dagon, the principle Philistine god, killing more Philistines than he had done throughout the rest of his life.
 - Though the Philistine oppression continued for a short time after his death, Samson effectively delivered Israel from their bondage, despite his moral decay, demonstrating that judgeship had nothing to do with spiritual character but came by sovereign, divine choice.
- b. **Minor/Secondary Judges:** called minor/secondary for the relatively short literary material devoted to them, not for their insignificance.
- 1) **Shamgar** (3:31): delivered the south-central Israelites from Philistine oppression most likely sometime after Ehud's judgeship.
 - 2) **Tola** (10:1-2): delivered Manassah from the civil turmoil raised by Abimelech's brief and ill-fated attempt at kingship. His judgeship lasted 23 years.
 - 3) **Jair** (10:3-5): served as judge in Gilead for 22 years, most likely concurrently or just following Tola's judgeship.
 - 4) **Ibzan** (12:8-10): little information is given regarding the nature of Ibzan's judgeship. He apparently led Israel for seven years in and around Bethlehem.
 - 5) **Elon** (12:11-12): led after the death of Ibzan with a judgeship lasting 10 years and centered around Aijalon in Zebulun.
 - 6) **Abdon** (12:13-15): followed the judgeship of Elon and led for 8 years in Ephraim.

E. The Spirit of Yahweh

1. The phrase "Spirit of Yahweh" appears 7x in the book of Judges.
2. In each instance, the narrative describes Yahweh's Spirit coming upon a particular individual and endowing him with special power and leadership to deliver Israel from their oppression.
 - a. Othniel (3:10)
 - b. Gideon (6:34)
 - c. Jephthah (11:29)
 - d. Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14)

3. Even though the Spirit is only mentioned in relation with these four judges, it may be assumed that the Spirit came upon all the judges in like manner, enabling them to accomplish their tasks in a unique way that made it clear that Yahweh was with them and had raised them up to deliver Israel.
4. This kind of ministry should not be confused with the NT work of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The OT ministry of the Spirit was for the purpose of empowering a certain individual for specific activity related to the theocracy of Israel—a *theocratic* anointing.
 - b. The Spirit's anointing did not endow the individual with spiritual character—the text, after all, mentions four separate occasions where Yahweh's Spirit came upon Samson.
 - c. The special presence of Yahweh's Spirit on an individual was not permanent. When the individual's divinely ordained purposes were accomplished, the anointing would cease.
 - d. This is starkly contrasted with the ministry of the Spirit in the NT, where the Holy Spirit permanently indwells believers (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19), baptizes them in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), seals them as a guarantee of future inheritance (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30), and fills them with the knowledge of Christ (Eph 5:18-20).

F. The Angel of Yahweh

1. Before the book of Judges, the angel of Yahweh is mentioned 17x.
 - a. In Gen 16, he appears to Hagar after Sarah had expelled her
 - b. In Gen 22, he appears to Abraham just moments before he sacrificed Isaac.
 - c. In Exod 3, he appeared to Moses in the burning bush.
 - d. In Num 22, he appeared to Balaam in order to stop him from his quest to curse Israel on behalf of Balak, king of Moab.
2. In the book of Judges, however, the angel of Yahweh is mentioned 15x, providing a fuller picture of the angel of Yahweh:
 - a. *He speaks for Yahweh*—"angel" means "messenger," indicating that he is Yahweh's chief spokesman and representative to the people.
 - b. *He is Yahweh*—he identifies himself as the one who led Israel out of Egypt (2:1). When Gideon encountered him and perceived that it was the angel of Yahweh, he instantly feared for his life (6:22; cf. Isa 6:5 where Isaiah has the same reaction when he saw the Lord). When he interacted with Samson's parents, he noted that his name was "wonderful" (13:18) and "ascended in the flame of the altar" when they offered up a burnt offering to Yahweh (13:20).
 - c. *He comes in the form of a person*—he "came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah" (6:11). He "put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread" (6:21).

- d. *He is not an ordinary person*—“then the angel of Yahweh vanished from his sight” (6:21).
3. Most likely, the angel of Yahweh was the pre-incarnate Christ who came to represent Yahweh during the OT:
 - a. The Messiah’s names include “Wonderful Counselor” (Isa 9:6).
 - b. The angel of Yahweh is attributed with redemption (Gen 48:15-16; Isa 63:7-9).
 - c. There is no record of *the* angel of Yahweh appearing after the birth of Christ. In all instances in the NT, it is *an* angel of the Lord, but never *the* angel of the Lord.
4. In any case, the frequent appearance of the angel of Yahweh in Judges may harken back to Moses’ promise that Yahweh would send his “angel” before them to guard them as they entered the land, driving out the Canaanites before them (Exod 23:20, 22-23).
 - a. This may explain why the angel of Yahweh (called the “captain of Yahweh’s army”) appeared to Joshua on the eve of Israel’s conquest (Josh 5:13-15).
 - b. The commands in Exod 23:20-33 are two-fold: do not worship the Canaanite gods (23:24), and do not make a covenant with the Canaanites (23:32). Faithfulness to these stipulations would ensure that Yahweh’s angel would lead them into the land.
 - c. As noted previously, it is interesting that these were the two reasons given in Judg 2:16-19 for why Yahweh had not driven out all the Canaanites: Israel had made covenants with the inhabitants, and they fell into idolatry.
 - d. Thus, the angel of Yahweh appears throughout not only as Yahweh’s representative, but as the one who is both responsible for Israel’s oppression and for their deliverance.

G. The Brutality of the Society

1. The book of Judges reveals much about the brutality of the era.
2. Even the Hebrew narrative descriptions include graphic depictions that English translations sometimes smooth over in order to make it less shocking and frank.
3. In particular, the final narrative regarding the Levite and his concubine (chs. 19-21) make obvious the reality that the men of Gibeah had become just as depraved as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19).

H. The Kingship

1. Kingship—or lack thereof—forms a central theme of the story of the judges.
2. The thematic statement of the book reveals that the lack of monarchy left a moral and spiritual vacuum throughout the nation: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25; cf. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1).
3. Kingship first appears in the narrative of Gideon, where he is offered kingship by his hometown following his victory over the Midianites. Gideon, of course, refuses this request, and it doesn’t appear that this attempt to make him king was national. Never-

theless, Gideon allows a golden ephod to be made which becomes an idolatrous snare to his household.

4. Following Gideon's death, his son Abimelech attempted to establish himself as king by assassinating Gideon's other sons. Jotham, however, escaped and finally the people of Shechem, where Abimelech had made himself king, turned against him, forcing him to attack and destroy the town. When he turned northward to destroy the citadel in Thebez, he was killed, thus ending Israel's first—albeit illegitimate—monarchy.
5. All of this points to the lawless character of the nation during an era when there was no overarching central figure to lead Israel militarily and spiritually. The nation's fractured character and deplorable morality was attributed to their lack of leadership.

IV. Purpose

- A. The purpose can be stated as so: *The failure of Israel during the period of the Judges demonstrates Israel's need for a righteous human King.*
- B. The entire book centers on the need for a godly leader to turn Israel to God. The judges/deliverers provided by Yahweh were only temporary solutions to a growing problem in the nation. Ultimately, the nation needed a national figure to lead them in righteousness.
- C. The Abrahamic Covenant had established the need for and promise of a king over God's people. It was always God's plan to place a king over Israel.
- D. Thus, the monarchy did not begin when Israel chose Saul to reign over them. It started with God's eternal plan laid out in the Abrahamic Covenant.

V. The Literary Structure

- A. **Introduction: Israel's Disobedience (1:1-2:23):** The first two chapters serve as a transition from the death of Joshua and the era of the judges. It establishes the condition of Israel and the justification for the repeated oppressions they experienced.
 1. **Incomplete Conquest of Israel (1:1-36):** The first reason for Israel's oppression throughout Judges is introduced in a literary bridge that describes a series of incomplete conquests that overlap with the narratives of the book of Joshua. The reader is repeatedly reminded that the tribes failed to completely capture the land given them.
 2. **Idolatry of Israel (2:1-23):** The second reason Israel experienced oppression throughout Judges is explained. The presence of the Canaanites within the land and the failure of Israel to destroy their idols and centers of worship became a snare that pulled them into idolatry and covenant infidelity.
- B. **Historical Cycles: Israel's Deliverance (3:1-16:31):** The first major section of the book of Judges introduces the individuals whom Yahweh provided as deliverers for Israel. There seem to be parallels in the way the six main judges are arranged. Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah/Barak all receive relatively shorter narratives. Starting with Gideon, however, the narratives lengthen, and the individuals receive inconclusive evaluations. They are

precursors to the kings that will come in Israel's later history, and starting with Gideon, there is increased fracturing and civil war between the tribes.

SEVEN JUDGES (3:7-16:31) ⁸	
a	Othniel (3:7-11; 1:11-15) -evaluation: positive -procures a <u>good Israelite wife</u> by obeying Yahweh -drives Canaanites from the land and settles there - <u>wife presses him</u> for a good thing: to extend territory - <u>good</u> judge, leading a <u>united</u> Israel -blessed by his brave <u>Israelite father-in-law</u>
b	Ehud (3:12-30) -evaluation: positive - <u>transjordanian king</u> oppresses Israel <u>eighteen years</u> ; occurs in <u>Benjamin</u> -Ehud has a secret <u>message</u> and <u>message</u> from God for enemy king - <u>captures fords of Jordan</u> and with help of <u>Ephraimites</u> kills thousands of enemies attempting to cross -Israelites united
c	Deborah and Barak (4:1-5:31) -evaluation: positive - <u>woman crushes Sisera's skull</u> in a careless moment -Israelites united
d	TURNING POINT: Gideon (6:1-8:32) -evaluation: positive / negative (1) Gideon's stand <u>against idolatry at Ophrah</u> (6:1-32) (2) Gideon's battle against Midianites (6:33-7:25) (2') Gideon's battle against Israelites (8:1-21) (1') Gideon's lapse <u>into idolatry at Ophrah</u> (8:22-32)
c'	Abimelech (8:33-9:57) -evaluation: negative - <u>woman crushes Abimelech's skull</u> in careless moment Israelites fragmented—civil war
b'	Jephthah (10:6-12:7) -evaluation: negative - <u>Transjordanian king</u> oppresses Israel <u>eighteen years</u> ; occurs in <u>Benjamin</u> -Jephthah sends <u>messages</u> twice to enemy king - <u>captures fords of Jordan</u> and kills thousands of <u>Ephraimites</u> who cross -Israelites fragmented—civil war
a'	Samson (13:1-16:31) -evaluation: negative -procures <u>bad wife</u> from Canaan's native population, disobeying Yahweh -settles among the pagan inhabitants of Canaan -wife <u>presses him</u> for bad things: to betray his secret - <u>bad</u> judge, <u>fragmenting</u> Israel -betrayed by his cowardly pagan <u>father-in-law</u>

⁸ Outline adapted from David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 105-121.

C. **Epilogue: Israel's Depravity (17:1-21:25):** This lengthy epilogue contains two extended narratives that capture the spiritual and moral nature of Israel during the era of the judges and make it clear that the current individuals sent by Yahweh to deliver Israel were inadequate to turn Israel back to God.

1. **Idolatry of Israel (17:1-18:31):** The first episode recounts the story of a wealthy Ephraimite named Micah who had built a pagan shrine in his house and employed a passing Levite to act as priest. Then men from the tribe of Dan passed through and persuaded the Levite to serve as priest in a pagan shrine they were to establish when they occupied Laish, for they could not occupy their own inherited land on account of the remaining Canaanites. As it so happens, the name of this Levite is Jonathan son of Gershom—the grandson of Moses. This demonstrates the overall moral decline of the nation—even the grandson of such prodigious stock as Moses had succumbed to Canaanization.
2. **Immorality and Warfare in Israel (19:1-21:25):** The second episode describes a Levite who had retrieved his concubine from Bethlehem and was returning to Ephraim through the land of Benjamin. He sought shelter in the home of an old man, but during the night his concubine was violated by men from the city to such an extent that he found her dead at the entrance to the house. By the authority of the elders, the body was cut to pieces and sent to various parts of the region as a token of the violence of the men of Benjamin. Thus, the tribe of Benjamin was virtually annihilated, and in an effort to preserve the tribe, the remaining 600 Benjamite men procured wives for themselves from maidens from Shiloh and Jabesh Gilead. The entire story points to the gross Canaanization of the nation, attributing to their character the same level of debauchery as those of Sodom and Gomorrah.

VI. Suggested Resources

Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth*. New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1999.

David, Dale Ralph. *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible. Geanies House, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000.