

### Introduction to Judges

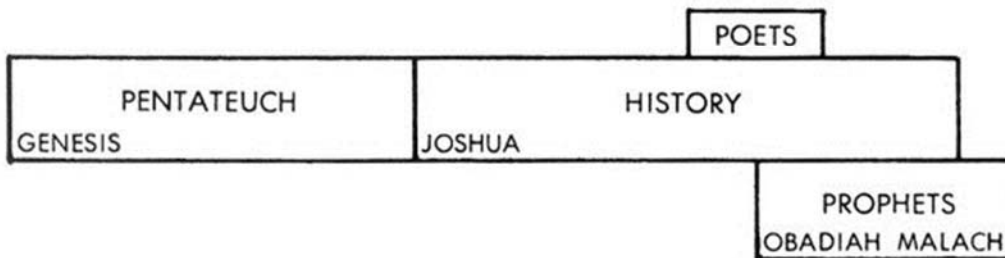
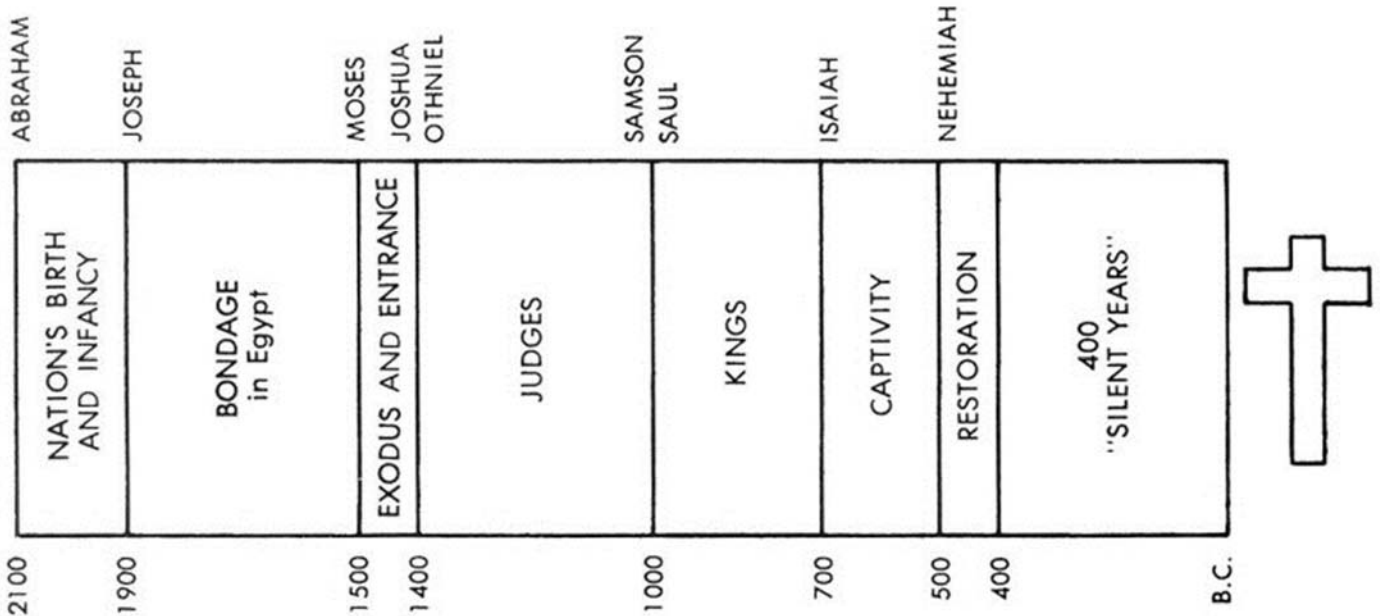
The book of Judges is the seventh book of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Scriptures is classified as a prophetic book – it is intended to teach, not just serve to record history.

In our first lesson, we will attempt to give a broad overview of the book. Next week, we will dive into the text itself.

It would be helpful to keep these first pages with you throughout our study, as they will help you keep your bearings as we work through the 21 chapters of Judges.

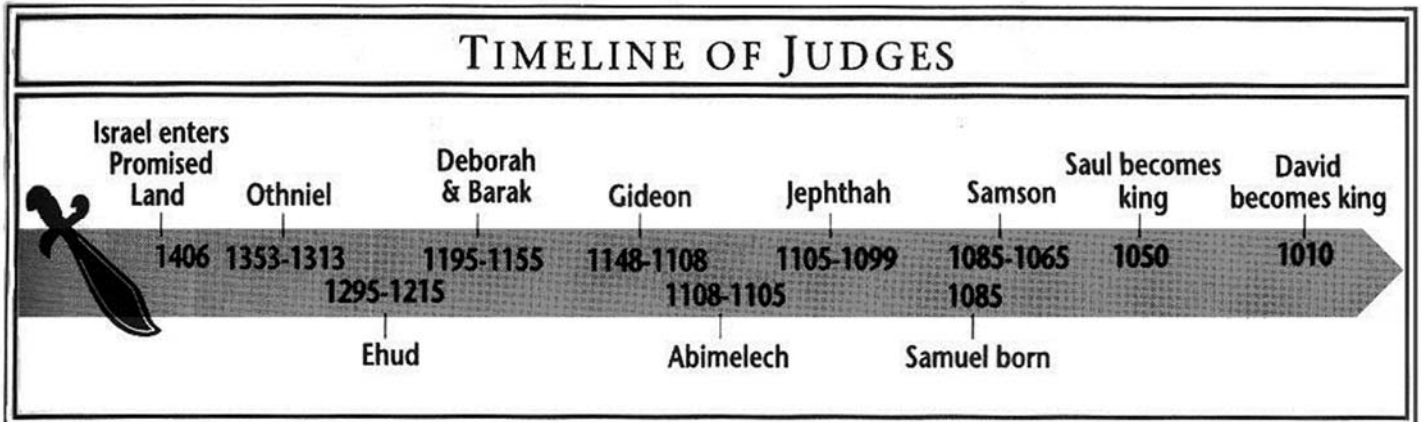
#### WHEN DOES JUDGES TAKE PLACE?

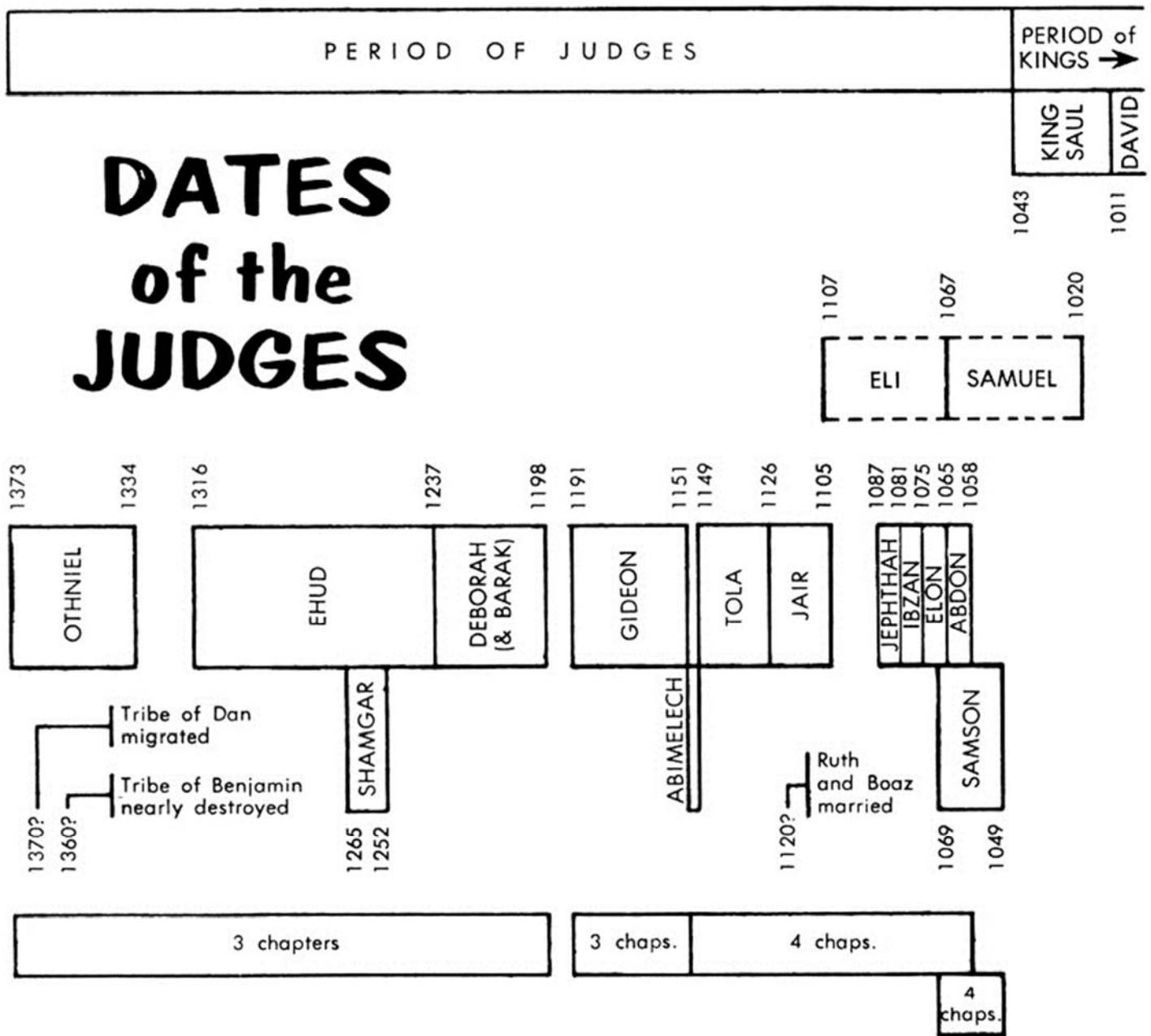
Irving Jensen Old Testament Timeline – Placement of the Book of Judges:



#### WHAT IS THE TIMING FOR JUDGES?

Ryrie Study Bible Timeline:





# DATES of the JUDGES

As becomes evident very quickly, scholars have varying opinions about the exact date estimates. The dates are fairly close, and do not cause issue with the overall understanding of the book of Judges. We do have some helpful hints.

In Acts 13:20, Stephen gives his piercing presentation of Israel’s unbelief before he is stoned to death. He describes Judges this way: “After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.” As indicated, this would include time covered by part of the book of 1 Samuel (Eli and Samuel are identified as judges).

1 Kings 6:1 gives another figure which provides the time from the Exodus to Solomon’s reign: “And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.” This gives us a specific window of time in which the all the events from the Exodus with Moses, the book of Joshua, the book of Judges, and the book of 1 Samuel fit within.

These certainly help us with time calculations. In addition, there are time periods given in Judges – years of oppression and years of peace – that give more information. Because of 1 Kings 6:1, it does appear that some of the time periods of the judges overlap. Most enemies were not large enough to oppress the entire population of Israel’s tribes, but were regional, oppressing certain tribes and areas, as we’ll see. Judges *does* reflect the *condition* of the entire nation.

### **Dr. Tom Constable on the General Timing of the Writing of Judges:**

Internal references help us locate the approximate date of composition of this book. The clause, “In those days there was no king in Israel,” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) suggests that someone wrote Judges during the monarchical period that followed the period of rule by judges (amphictyony). Someone probably wrote it after 1051 B.C. when Saul became king. However at the time of writing Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Jebusites (1:21). David captured Jerusalem about 1004 B.C. Therefore the writing of Judges seems to date between 1051 and 1004 B.C.

Dr Constable also points out: “Consequently the Book of Judges records about 300 years of Israel’s history (cf. 11:26). This is about 30 percent of the total history of Israel in the Old Testament (from about 1446 B.C. to 430 B.C.)”

### **MEANING OF THE WORD “JUDGES”**

And of course, we all know that in English it is called the book of Judges, which gets its name from Latin, *Liber Iudicum* (the Book of Judges), or the Greek Septuagint, *kritai*, but all of those words translate the Hebrew word *shofetim*, which usually means “judges.”

This name “Judges” leads to some problems already.

1. None of the main characters in the book is specifically identified as a judge—that is, as a *shofet*—in the book.
2. The root *shafat* is not found in the framework (Prologues, 1:1-2:5, and Epilogues, 17–21)
3. Judges occur before this book (Moses assigned 70 judges to judge) and Eli and Samuel are identified as judges.
4. None of the judges is shown to be functioning as a judge in a legal sense (arbitrating disputes).
5. The main characters are instead presented as “saviors” (*moshi'im*) who are delivering the people from a foreign enemy.
6. The Hebrew verb *shafat* is actually capable of a wide range of interpretations. At its root, the word *shafat* means “to rule” or “to govern” or “to exercise leadership.” It can mean “to judge” internal affairs as we think of it, but it can also mean “to lead in dealing with outside threats.” That is how it is used in the book of Judges.

### **SOME KEY THOUGHTS ABOUT JUDGES:**

#### **Five Aspects of Israel’s Faithlessness and Failure**

##### **1. Their Descending Spiral of a Repeated Cycle**

Judges records systemic moral and spiritual failure, repeating but increasingly downward as it progresses.

##### **2. Their Self-Defined Lifestyle**

Doing evil in the eyes of the LORD and doing right in one’s own eyes is their rule of life.

##### **3. The Canaanization of Israel**

“Canaanization” is a term that was coined by Daniel Block. This overall idea is that Israelites are becoming like their surroundings, becoming like what they were to defeat and drive out. By the time you get to the end of the book, when you ask the question, “Is there any difference between an Israelite and a Canaanite?” the answer is an astonishing “No.”

##### **4. A Reversal of Joshua’s Conquest**

Most of what happens in Judges is an undoing of what Joshua accomplished. This reflects, in many ways, our own spiritual lives. Maturity has to be maintained. Victory has to be guarded. Fruitfulness has to be pursued.

##### **5. A Rejection of the Revealed Will of God**

Judges is filled with stories of reversal, where the teachings of Deuteronomy are either unknown by the characters, or they’re ignored altogether.

#### **One True Hero: God Is Faithful**

##### **1. God is the Deliverer and Rescuer of Israel**

##### **2. God is the Ruler and King of Israel (“no king in Israel” indicates no submission to God)**

##### **3. God is the Judge of Israel**

### **A HIGH-LEVEL OUTLINE OF JUDGES:**

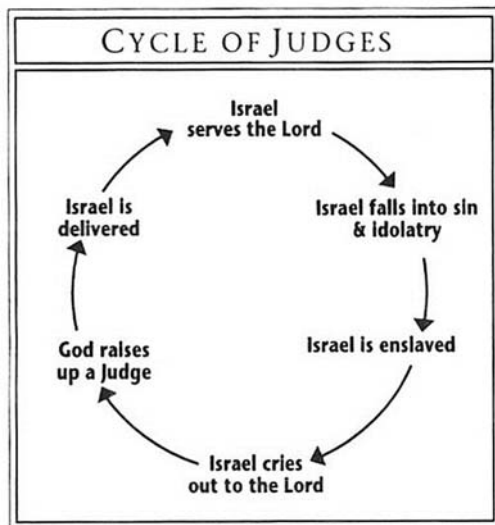
#### **The Two-Part Prologue (1:1-3:6)**

#### **The Cycles of the Judges (3:7-16:31)**

#### **The Two-Part Epilogue (17-21)**

## A General Representation of the Cycle Found in Judges (Not All Judges Have All Components):

*This is somewhat overemphasized and misinterpreted, but at least it gives us a basic idea of what "cycle" means:*



<sup>8</sup> Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died *when he was* one hundred and ten years old. <sup>9</sup> And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

<sup>10</sup> When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

<sup>11</sup> Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; <sup>12</sup> and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from *among* the gods of the people who *were* all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. <sup>13</sup> They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

<sup>14</sup> And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. <sup>15</sup> Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup> Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which

their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. <sup>18</sup> And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. <sup>19</sup> And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

<sup>20</sup> Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, <sup>21</sup> "I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, <sup>22</sup> "so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept *them*, or not." <sup>23</sup> Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua. (Judges 2:8-23)

*As we proceed through Judges, Israel goes from bad to worse. As they continue to reject God, they are in a moral tailspin. Additionally, the judges also decline with them. The farther we go in Judges, the worse the judges become. As a rule, the more that we know about a judge, the worse the judge is.*

**NOTE:** *The Book of Judges is not an ethics book. It is not intended to give guidance but to show what people do when they abandon God's Word and God's leadership in their lives. Further, the judges are not intended to be role models. Most are sinful and make choices based upon what is right in their own eyes. Even when some of the Judges are referenced in Hebrews 11, what is highlighted is a moment of obedience and faith, not necessarily (and often, most certainly not) their lifestyles:* Heb. 11:32-34 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets; <sup>33</sup> who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

### Chart of the Deliverers of Israel\*

Judge	Oppressor	Years Oppressed	Years of Peace	Approx. Dates BC	Reference
1. Othniel	Mesopotamia	8	40	1374-1334	3:9-11
2. Ehud	Moab, Ammon, Midian	18	80	1316-1235	3:15-30
3. Shamgar	Midian			Ca. 1230	3:31
4. Barak (Deborah)	Canaan	20	40	1216-1176	4:4-5:31
5. Gideon	Midian	7	40	1169-1129	6:11-8:35
6. Tola	Amalek		23	1120-1097	10:1-2
7. Jair	Amalek		22	1120-1097	10:3-5
8. Jephthah	Ammon	18	6	1085-1079	11:1-12:7
9. Ibzan	Ammon		7	1079-1072	12:8-10
10. Elon	Ammon		8	1072-1062	12:11-12
11. Abdon	Ammon		8	1062-1054	12:13-15
12. Samson	Philistia	40	20	1095-1075	13:2-16:31

\*modified from *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Revised and Expanded*, by Gleason L. Archer, Moody Press, p. 298