

Judges (military leaders, may have headed tribes).

Time Frame

- Probably not chronological as suggested. The entire period of the judges probably lasted around 200 years. Instead, organized by tribe, geographically.

Composition

- Poetic fragment “Song of Deborah” is the only part known to come from the time of the Judges (probably between 1300 and 1100 BCE).
- Most likely framed by the D author, who gave it its current structure. Could have been shaped from older records.

Formula and Organization

- First introduction (1.1-36) contrasts the era’s failed leadership with the successful leadership of Joshua.
- Second Introduction (2.6-3.6) sets up organizing principle: Deuteronomic History formula. Israel is guilty of apostasies (defections from Yahweh).
- Cycle of Apostasy:
 - Betrayal
 - Divine punishment
 - A prayer for help
 - The rise of a “judge” sent by God who saved Israel
 - A period of peace during which Israel is ruled by judge
- Repeat of two refrains and a variant:
 - “The people again did evil in the sight of the Lord;”
 - “In those days there was no king in Israel.”
 - *Variant*: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”
- Judges 3.7-16.31
- Bloody Conclusion—(17-21): Illustrates self-destructive forces at work in Israel.
- Chaos (e.g. civil war between Danites and Benjamites over prostitute) shows kingship is inevitable and necessary. However, anti-king voices at work too: Story of Gideon and Abimelech

Judges

- Othniel
- Ehud—“coarse Benjamite saga about an ancient hero who killed Eglon, king of Moab.”
- Deborah and Barak, great victory to secure Esdraelon Valley, destruction of Taanach around 1125 BCE (Archeological record)
- Gideon (Jerubbaal) defends Israelites against Midian raiders. Refused kingship, which was seized by his son, Abimelech.
- Abimelech (not a judge) shows the danger of kingship and the temptation for tyranny
- Tola and Jair (no military exploits)
- Jephthah was a Robin Hood type, son of a prostitute. Social class and gender not obstacles for judgeship. Sacrificed his daughter to fulfill a vow.
- Samson, no military exploits, problems with fatal attraction to Philistine women. Included because of his (pyrrhic) victory over the Philistines—a reaffirmation of Yahweh’s presence.