

# Judges

The book of Judges stands in stark contrast to Joshua. There, an obedient people conquered the land through trust in the power of God. But in Judges, a disobedient and idolatrous people are frequently defeated because of their rebellion against God. In seven distinct cycles of sin, Judges shows how the nation has set aside God's law and, in its place, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). The result was corruption from within and oppression from without. From time-to-time God raises up military champions to throw off the yoke of bondage and restore the nation to pure worship. But all too soon the "sin cycle" begins again as the nation's spiritual temperature grows steadily colder.

## INTRODUCTION

The historical purpose of Judges is to carry the story of Israel from the death of Joshua to the time of Samuel and the beginning of the united kingdom. It was written during the reign of Saul (1043-1011 b.c.) or during the first seven years of David's reign (1011-1004 b.c.), and it gives an explanation and defense of Israel's monarchy (see 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The nation needed to be unified under a righteous king.

Like the other historical books of the Bible, Judges presents the historical facts in a very selective and thematic way. For example, chapters 17-21 actually preceded most of chapters 3-16, but these chapters appear at the end of the book to illustrate the moral conditions that were prevailing during the period. Judges gives a geographical survey of apostasy to illustrate its spread and a chronological survey to illustrate its growing intensity. The book reaches a climax in chapters 17-21 with the last verse as a fitting summary.

Theologically, Judges makes a clear contrast between the idolatry, immorality, and violence of Israel and Yahweh's covenant faithfulness and gracious deliverance of the people. In His patient love, God forgave the people every single time they repented. Israel often acted in foolishness, ingratitude, stubbornness, and rebellion, and this led to defeat. Sin always leads to suffering, and repentance always leads to deliverance.

The Hebrew title is *Shophetim*, meaning "judges, rulers, deliverers, or saviors." *Shophet* not only carries the idea of maintaining justice and settling disputes, but it is also used to mean "liberating and delivering." First the judges deliver the people; then they rule and administer justice.

## AUTHOR

The author of Judges is anonymous, but Samuel or one of his prophetic students may have written it. Jewish tradition contained in the Talmud attributes Judges to Samuel, and certainly he was the crucial link between the period of the judges and the period of the kings.

## DATE & SETTING

If Judges was not written by Samuel it was at least written by one of his contemporaries between 1043 b.c. (the beginning of Saul's reign) and 1004 b.c. (David's capture of Jerusalem).

The events covered in Judges range from about 1380 b.c. - 1045 b.c. (c. 335 years), but the period of the judges extends another thirty years since it includes the life of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1-5:1). Evidently, the rulership's of some of the judges overlap because not all of them ruled over the entire land. Judges describes the cycles of apostasy, oppression, and deliverance in the southern region (3:7-31), the northern region (4:1-5:31), the central region (6:1-10:5), the eastern region (10:6-12:15), and the western region (13:1-16:31). The spread of apostasy covers the whole land.