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Article 7: Judges at a Glance

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JUDGES AT A GLANCE

This book records the military activities of 12 men and one woman designated as Judges and raised up by God to deliver the people of Israel from their sufferings caused by their sin and following their repentance.

BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION

WARNING! DO NOT READ THIS BOOK WHEN DISCOURAGED!

The reason? Judges faithfully records an unedited account of the saddest, most sordid and shameful period in the entire Old Testament. It is the Dark Ages in Israel's history. Chapters 17-21 in this book are probably the most depressing in all the Bible. In brief, Judges speaks of seven apostasies on Israel's part, seven servitudes to seven heathen nations, and seven deliverances. Judges thus can be summarized by four words:

- Sin: Israel turns from the living God
- Slavery: God allows pagan nations to occupy the land
- Supplication: Israel forsakes its sin and prays for deliverance
- Salvation: God graciously raises up judges to deliver Israel

In reality these judges (13 in number) were not legal experts (as the title might suggest), but rather military leaders.

FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

1. Who? **Samuel.** He was the son of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:19, 20) who anointed both Saul and David as king over Israel (1 Sam. 9:27-10:1; 16:13).
2. What? The books of Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel 1-24.
3. When and where? 1020 B.C. (?), probably from Shiloh (1 Sam. 3:21) or Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17) in Israel.
4. Why?
 - a. **Judges.** The woes of Israel (due to sin) and the warriors of God (the 12 Judges)
 - b. Ruth. The thrilling love story of David's great-grandparents, Boaz and Ruth.
 - c. 1 Sam. 1-24. Saul's anointing as Israel's first king and subsequent persecution of David.
5. To whom? The generations living just prior to and immediately following the monarchy in Israel.

KEY EVENTS

1. The ministries of Othniel and Ehud
2. The ministries of Deborah and Barak
3. The ministry of Gideon
4. The ministry of Jephthah

5. The ministry of Samson
6. The partial restoration of the tribe of Benjamin following a bloody inter-tribal war

KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **Othniel:** Israel's first judge who defeated Mesopotamia and gave the land rest for 40 years
2. **Ehud:** Israel's second judge who defeated the Moabites by killing their king Eglon
3. **Deborah:** Israel's fourth judge and a prophetess who helped Barak (Israel's fifth judge) defeat God's enemies
4. **Barak:** Israel's fifth judge who defeated the Canaanites by the waters of Megiddo
5. **Sisera:** Canaanite military leader killed by a woman named Jael
6. **Gideon:** Israel's sixth judge who defeated a vast Midianite army with only 300 chosen warriors
7. **Abimelech:** wicked son of Gideon who shed much blood in his unsuccessful attempt to rule over Israel
8. **Jephthah:** Israel's ninth judge who defeated the Ammonites, but fell victim to a rash vow he had made
9. **Manoah:** father of Samson who was told by an angel that his unborn son would be raised as a Nazarite
10. **Samson:** Israel's thirteenth judge who killed 1000 Philistines but was himself done in by a woman
11. **Delilah:** Philistine harlot who betrayed Samson into the hands of the Philistines

KEY PLACES

1. **Jerusalem:** key city of the Jebusite pagans
2. **Jericho (or, City of Palms):** headquarter city of the Moabite King Eglon
3. **Mt. Tabor:** place from which Israel's Canaanite enemies were totally routed by Barak and his soldiers
4. **Kishon River and Megiddo Springs:** area where God swept away Barak's enemies by way of a heaven sent flood
5. **Mizpah:** hometown of Jephthah
6. **Sorek Valley:** homeland of Delilah
7. **Bethlehem:** home city of a concubine whose murder would result in an Israelite inter-tribal war
8. **Bethel:** location of the Ark of the Covenant during the Judges period (20:27)
9. **Shiloh:** city where some surviving Benjamite soldiers found some wives

UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The root of Israel's problem was very simple. When Moses died, God looked around and found a man who could take his place—Joshua. But at the death of Joshua, no man could be found who would pick up his fallen banner. Heaven, like the military here on earth, is still looking for a few good men (and women). The following phrase is found four times in Judges: *"In those days there was no king in Israel, but every*

man did that which was right in his own eyes"(17:6, see also 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

This period is thus the antithesis of the millennium when King Jesus will rule with a rod of iron (Psa. 2).

2. The fruit of Israel's problem was really two-fold:
 - Compromise: Israel was guilty of not doing what God had commanded the nation to do, that is, drive out its enemies (see 1:21, 27-33; 2:1-5).
 - Apostasy: Israel was guilty of doing what God had commanded her not to do, that is, worship the gods of her enemies (see 2:11-13).
3. Israel's moral condition grew progressively worse as the downward cycle was repeated. Each time a judge died, *"the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them"*(2:19).
4. In spite of all this, God still loved his people. In the Old Testament the angel of the Lord is mentioned 80 times. It is thought by most theologians that the Angel of the Lord was none other than Christ himself. No less than 20 of these instances are found in the book of Judges. In addition to the ministry of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit of God came upon and empowered many of the judges. Thus, during no other biblical period in the Old Testament did God minister more to his people than at this time.
5. The first biblical battle fought at a place called Megiddo occurs in Judges (5:19). It is thought that heaven's angels may have aided Israel in this battle (5:20). The last biblical battle takes place at Megiddo (Rev. 16:14). Angels also participate (Rev. 14:18-20).
6. This book marks the first instance of a man refusing the kingship of Israel, and of another attempting to obtain it through bloodshed (8:22; 9:6).
7. Judges records for us the first Nazarite in history and the strongest man who ever lived—Samson! (13:2-5; 15:15).
8. It tells of the man who made the most tragic vow in scripture (9:11).
9. It gives the account of an army put to death for mispronouncing a word! (12:6)
10. It includes one of two fables in the Bible (9:7-15). For the other, see 2 Kings 14:9.
11. It speaks of 300 victorious men (7:7) and 600 desperate men (20:46, 47).
12. It provides scripture's most extended account of throwing out the fleece (6:36-40).
13. It shows how the sovereign God can even use an evil angel to accomplish His will (9:23).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Exodus, Joshua, Hosea, Galatians, First Corinthians:

- In Exodus, after the death of Joseph, there arose a new king in Egypt who refused to recognize either the power or purity of almighty God (Ex. 1:8)
- In Judges, after the death of Joshua, there arose a new generation in Canaan who made the same fatal error (see 2:10).
- In Joshua, there is strong, sustained leadership, and unity among the tribes; in Judges there is a sustained leader, and disunity among the tribes.
- In Joshua Israel takes land from the Canaanites; in Judges the Canaanites take land from Israel.

- Joshua emphasizes obedience, victory, and freedom; Judges shows disobedience, defeat, and slavery.
- The final part of Galatians 5 proved an excellent summary of the books of Joshua and Judges (see 5:22-26 concerning Joshua and 5:17-21 concerning Judges). *"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"* (Gal. 5:19-23).
- Judges is the classic example of Hosea 8:7 and Gal. 6:7: *"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind"* (Hos. 8:7a). *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"* (Gal. 6:7-8).
- Judges also offers seven illustrations of 1 Cor. 1:27: *"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."* Note: In Judges God used: (1) an ox goad (3:31); (2) a nail (4:21); (3) some trumpets (7:20); (4) some pitchers (7:20); (5) some lamps (7:20); (6) a millstone (9:53); (7) the jawbone of an ass (15:15).

TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

1. Lord God of Israel (5:5)
2. Angel of the Lord (6:12)
3. Wonderful (14:17, 18)