OLD TESTAMENT · HISTORY · BOOK 7 OF 66

Judges

Every man did that which was right in his own eyes (21:25)

21	Samuel	c. 1380–1050 B.C.	12 Judges
Chapters, 618 Verses	Author	The Judges	6 Oppressors

STRUCTURE

The Book in Four Parts

Judges has a **prologue** showing why Israel failed (1:1–3:6), the **stories of the judges** (3:7–16:31), and an **epilogue** showing how far Israel fell when there was no king (17–21).



Each bar shows that part's share of the 618 verses.

I 1:1–3:6 · 65 verses

Prologue

The unfinished conquest and the pattern of the book.

II 3:7–9:57 · 237 verses

Othniel to Gideon

Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon, and Abimelech.

III 10–16 · 169 verses

Tola to Samson

Jephthah, the minor judges, and Samson.

IV 17–21 · 147 verses

No King in Israel

Micah's idols, Dan, Gibeah, and war with Benjamin.

JUDGES 2:11–19

The Cycle of the Judges

The same five steps repeat through the whole book, each time a little lower.

1 2:11–13

Sin

Israel does evil and serves Baalim and Ashtaroth.

2 2:14–15

Servitude

God sells them into the hand of their enemies.

3 3:9, 15

Supplication

The children of Israel cry unto the LORD.

4 2:16, 18

Salvation

The LORD raises up a judge who delivers them.

5 3:11, 30

Rest

The land has rest while the judge lives.

↻ 2:19

And Again

When the judge dies, they corrupt themselves more than their fathers.

> *"And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel."*
>
> Judges 2:10 (KJV)

YEARS OF TROUBLE AND REST

Six Oppressions

Each time Israel did evil, God used a nation to chasten them, and each time they cried out, He delivered them.

1 3:8–11

Mesopotamia

8 years. Delivered by Othniel; rest 40 years.

2 3:12–30

Moab

18 years. Delivered by Ehud; rest 80 years.

3 4:2–5:31

Canaan (Hazor)

20 years. Delivered by Deborah and Barak; rest 40 years.

4 6:1–8:28

Midian

7 years. Delivered by Gideon; rest 40 years.

5 10:7–11:33

Ammon

18 years. Delivered by Jephthah.

6 13:1

Philistines

40 years. Samson begins to deliver Israel.

> *"Many times did He deliver them; but they provoked Him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity."*
>
> Psalm 106:43 (KJV)

Where the Judges Served

MAP

Where the Judges Served

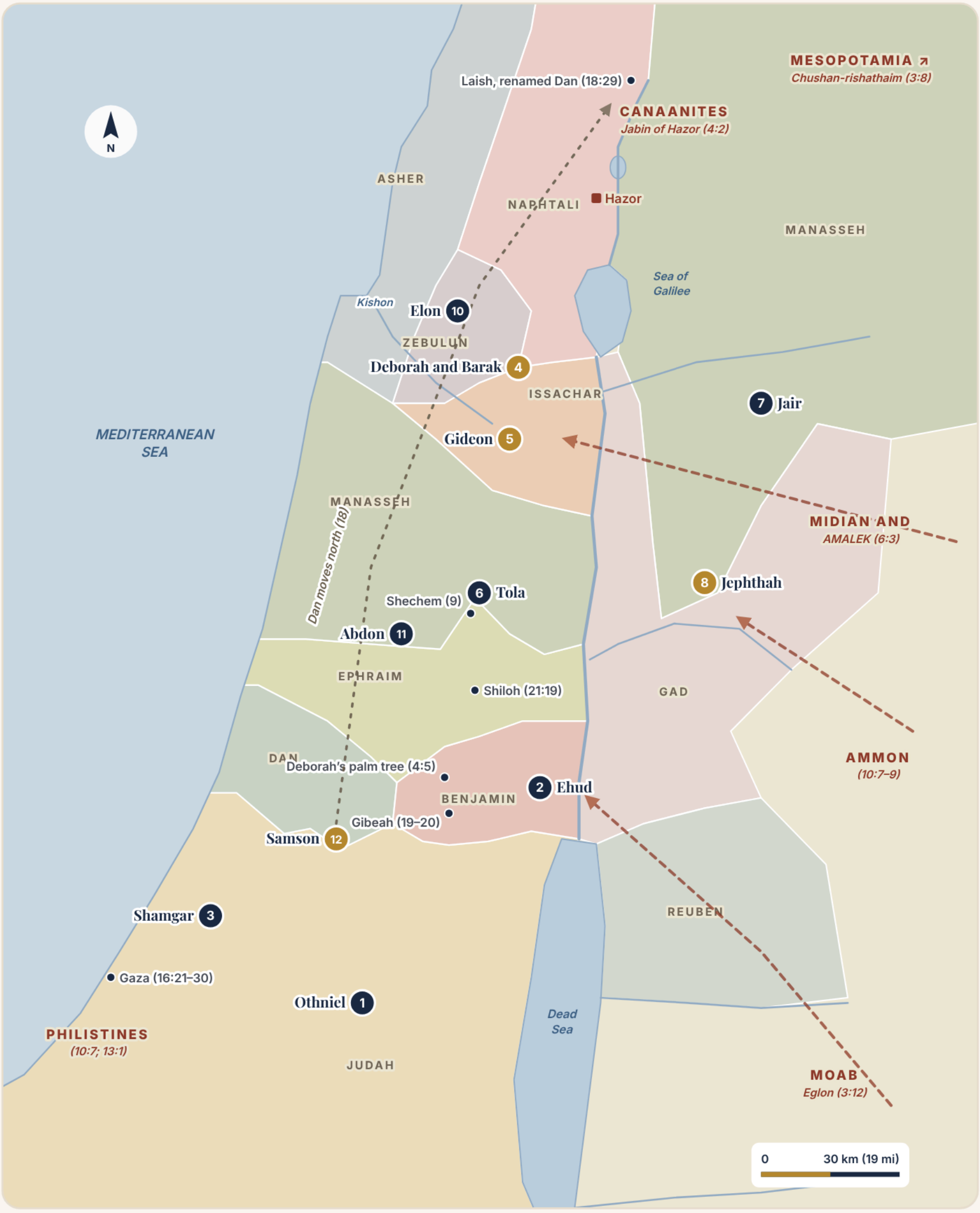
Most judges led one region, not the whole land. The map shows where each judge lived or fought, the tribal lands faintly, and the nations that oppressed Israel. The numbers match the twelve judges below.

JUDGES 3–16

Where the Judges Served

Twelve deliverers, six oppressors

The days when the judges ruled, c. 1380–1050 B.C.



Judges with full stories
Deborah and Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson

Other judges
Ibzan's Beth-lehem (12:8) is not marked

Tribal lands
As divided by Joshua (Joshua 13–19)

Oppressors
Nations God used to chasten Israel

"Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them."

JUDGES 2:16 (KJV)

Many of these places cannot be located with certainty; positions and borders are approximate.

The Twelve Judges

JUDGES 3–16

The Twelve Judges

Six judges have full stories; six get only a few verses. The numbers match the map.

1 3:7–11

Othniel

Judah · Chushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia. Caleb's younger brother; "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him." *8 years oppressed, 40 rest.*

2 3:12–30

Ehud

Benjamin · Eglon king of Moab. A lefthanded man who slew Eglon at the city of palm trees. *18 years oppressed, 80 rest.*

3 3:31

Shamgar

The Philistines. Slew six hundred Philistines with an ox goad.

4 4–5

Deborah and Barak

Ephraim; Naphtali · Jabin of Hazor and Sisera. Deborah judged under her palm tree; Barak's army came down from Tabor to the Kishon. *20 years oppressed, 40 rest.*

5 6–8

Gideon

Manasseh · Midian and Amalek. Three hundred men with trumpets, pitchers and lamps. *7 years oppressed, 40 rest.*

6 10:1–2

Tola

Issachar. Arose "to defend Israel" after Abimelech. *Judged 23 years.*

7 10:3–5

Jair

Gilead (Manasseh). Thirty sons on thirty ass colts, with thirty cities. *Judged 22 years.*

8 10:6–12:7

Jephthah

Gilead (Manasseh) · The children of Ammon. A mighty man of valour, driven out by his brethren, called back to lead. *18 years oppressed; judged 6.*

9 12:8–10

Ibzan

Of Beth-lehem; thirty sons and thirty daughters. *Judged 7 years.*

10 12:11–12

Elon

Zebulun. A Zebulonite, buried in Aijalon. *Judged 10 years.*

11 12:13–15

Abdon

Ephraim. Forty sons and thirty nephews on seventy ass colts. *Judged 8 years.*

12 13–16

Samson

Dan · The Philistines. A Nazarite from the womb, strong in body, weak in will. *40 years oppressed; judged 20.*

Abimelech, Gideon's son, made himself king at Shechem for three years (9:22), but he was never raised up by God as a judge.

JUDGES AT A GLANCE · PART 4 OF 5

Deborah and Barak, Gideon's Three Hundred

JUDGES 4–5

Deborah and Barak

A prophetess, a hesitant general, and a victory God won from heaven.

1 **4:4–5**

Deborah Judges

Under the palm tree between Ramah and Beth-el, Israel came to her for judgment.

2 **4:6–9**

Barak Called

"If thou wilt go with me, then I will go": the honour goes to a woman.

3 **4:14–16; 5:20–21**

The Battle at the Kishon

"They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera"

4 **4:17–22**

Jael

Sisera flees to Jael's tent, and she kills him with a nail of the tent.

> *"Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."*
>
> Judges 5:2 (KJV)

JUDGES 6–8

Gideon's Three Hundred

God made Gideon's army smaller and smaller, so that everyone would know the victory was His.

6:12

"Mighty Man of Valour"

Found threshing wheat in hiding

6:36–40

The Fleece

Wet, then dry: God gives a sign

7:3

32,000 → 10,000

"Whosoever is fearful … let him return"

7:6–7

10,000 → 300

Only those who lapped the water

JUDGES 7:20

Trumpets, Pitchers and Lamps

In the night the three hundred surrounded the camp of Midian, blew the trumpets, brake the pitchers, held up the lamps, and cried, "**The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.**" The LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, and the host fled.

> *"I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you."*
>
> Judges 8:23 (KJV)

JUDGES AT A GLANCE · PART 5 OF 5

Samson, No King in Israel, Key Themes and Key Verse

JUDGES 13–16

Samson: Strong and Weak

The strongest man in the Bible could not rule his own desires, yet God used him to begin delivering Israel.

HIS STRENGTH	HIS WEAKNESS
Rent a lion "as he would have rent a kid" 14:5–6	**Wanted a Philistine wife: "she pleaseth me well"** 14:3
Slew a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass 15:14–16	**Went in to a harlot at Gaza** 16:1
Carried the gates of Gaza to the top of a hill 16:3	**Told Delilah "all his heart," and his hair was shaven** 16:17–19

> *"O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God."*
> Judges 16:28 (KJV)

Hebrews 11:32–34 names Samson among those who "out of weakness were made strong."

JUDGES 17–21

No King in Israel

Four times the closing chapters repeat one sentence, and it explains the whole book.

1 · 17:6
Micah's Idols
A man makes his own gods and hires his own priest.

2 · 18:1
Dan Moves North
The Danites steal the idols and take Laish.

3 · 19:1
The Crime at Gibeah
A Levite's concubine is abused and killed in Benjamin.

4 · 21:25
Civil War
The tribes nearly destroy Benjamin, then grieve for it.

LOOKING FORWARD

The King Israel Needed
Judges shows that God's people need a righteous King. Ruth and Samuel tell how God provided David, "a man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), and through David's line Jesus Christ, the King who rules in righteousness for ever (Luke 1:32–33).

BIG IDEAS

Key Themes

Forgetting God
A generation that knew not the LORD.
2:10; 3:7; 8:34

Sin and Chastening
Sin brings bondage to the enemy.
2:14; 3:8; 6:1

God's Mercy
He hears their groaning and delivers again and again.
2:18; 10:16

The Spirit of the LORD
God's Spirit empowers weak deliverers.
3:10; 6:34; 14:6

Weak Made Strong
God uses the least, the few and the unlikely.
6:15; 7:2; Hebrews 11:34

Incomplete Obedience
The Canaanites left in the land become a snare.
1:28; 2:3

The LORD Is King
God is Israel's true Ruler and Judge.
8:23; 11:27

Everyone His Own Way
Without God's rule, each does what is right in his own eyes.
17:6; 21:25

Need for a King
The book points toward David and the coming Christ.
18:1; 19:1; Ruth 4:22

KEY VERSE

> *"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*
> **Judges 21:25 (KJV)**