

The Book of Judges chronicles roughly 450 years of Israelite history following the conquest of Canaan. This era represents one of four major 500-year epochs in the nation's early journey:

1. **Patriarchal:** From the birth of Abram to the death of Joseph.
2. **Egyptian:** From the death of Joseph to the Exodus.
3. **Theocratic:** From the Exodus to the establishment of the Monarchy.
4. **Monarchical:** From the Monarchy to the Babylonian Exile.

### The Nature of Leadership

The title "Judges" is somewhat of a misnomer in the modern legal sense. These figures were not robed magistrates presiding over courtrooms; rather, they were charismatic, occasional leaders raised up by God to address specific crises. They did not form a continuous succession of governors. Instead, the book serves as a historical indictment, illustrating the desperate need for a centralized king to bring order to intermittent national chaos.

Most scholars believe the book was likely compiled by the prophet **Samuel** prior to the reign of King David.

### The Cycle of Apostasy

The central theme of the book is captured in the haunting refrain: *"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* This phrase serves as a terrifying mirror for our modern society, describing a culture of total moral relativism.

After the death of Joshua, a new generation arose that forgot the miracles of the Exodus. By intermarrying with pagan neighbors, the Israelites became contaminated by idolatry. This "sordid slide" followed a predictable, tragic pattern:

- Sin: The people abandon God for idols.
- Suffering: God allows surrounding nations to subjugate them.
- Supplication: The people cry out in repentance.
- Salvation: God raises a "Judge" (deliverer) to break the servitude.

### The Six Major Servitudes

Throughout the book, Israel spent a cumulative **111 years** under foreign oppression:

- Mesopotamia (8 years): Delivered by Othniel.
- Moabites (18 years): Delivered by Ehud.
- Canaanites (20 years): Delivered by Deborah and Barak.

- Midianites: Delivered by Gideon.
- Ammonites: Delivered by Jephthah.
- Philistines: Delivered by Samson.

### **A Society in Decay: The Levite and the Concubine**

The book concludes with a dark "addendum" that illustrates the depth of Israel's depravity. A Levite, traveling to reclaim his concubine, sought lodging in the Benjamite city of Gibeah. In an episode reminiscent of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, the men of the city demanded the Levite be turned over to them. To protect himself, the Levite sacrificed his concubine to the mob; she was brutally abused until she died.

In a gruesome act of protest, the Levite dismembered her body and sent the parts to the twelve tribes to signal that the nation had reached a breaking point. This sparked a civil war that nearly annihilated the Tribe of Benjamin, leaving only 600 survivors.

**Key Insight:** Despite this near-extinction, it is a profound historical irony that Israel's first king, Saul, would eventually emerge from this very tribe—the Tribe of Benjamin.