

## Book of Judges

### Introduction

The Book of Judges (Sefer Shoftim - ספר שופטים) is the second book in the Nevi'im (Prophets) section of the Tanakh and the second book of the Nevi'im Rishonim (Former Prophets). According to tradition, Samuel is named as the author. The title Shoftim is taken from the content of the book – that of the history of Biblical judges who helped rule and guide the ancient Children of Israel.

Although there are two additional stories at the end of Shoftim, the last judge is considered to be Samson. The traditional and academic view is that Samson's exploits probably synchronized with the period immediately preceding the kohen gadol and judge Eli. Eli's story is then picked up in the Book of Samuel.

The Book of Judges is generally divided into three distinct sections.

### Introduction (Chapters 1-3:10)

A general overview of the conquest of Canaan is given.

God asked why the Children of Israel had not smashed the idols of the land's inhabitants and He passes judgment upon the Children of Israel.

Joshua died and was buried on the Mountain of Ephraim. There is an ongoing story regarding the Children of Israel worshipping foreign gods and God punishing the people.

### Book of Judges Proper (Chapters 3:11-16:31)

Due to the Children of Israel's idolatry, God allowed the people of the Land to remain in the land to test the Children of Israel. Due to the continuing idolatry of the Children of Israel, God gave them over to the king of Aram-naharaim for eight years in order to serve this king. Eglon the king of Moab was used by God to punish the Children of Israel and they were forced to serve Eglon for eighteen years. After the Children of Israel cried out, God gave them Ehud as a judge and deliverer who assassinated Eglon. Ehud escaped after the assassination and led the Children of Israel into battle against Moab.

The Children of Israel continued to do what was wicked in the sight of God and as a punishment, God handed the Children of Israel over to Jabin, the king of Canaan, and his head of the army was Sisera. The judges Deborah and Barak made plans to defeat Jabin. Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

and Sisera. Deborah and Barak went to war against Jabin and Sisera – forcing Sisera to retreat to the tent of Jael. While Sisera was sleeping, Jael killed him and the Children of Israel eventually destroyed Jabin and his army.

The Song of Deborah is used to describe the sufferings and the victory of the people.

The Children of Israel continued to worship idols so God gave them to Midian for seven years. After the Children of Israel cried out against the oppression, God sent a prophet – Phineas – to them to rebuke them. After sending an angel to Gideon to tell him he was chosen to be the judge, God ordered Gideon to destroy the altars of Baal and Asherah. When the people learned of this, they went to Joash to demand he turn over his son to them but Joash refused.

Gideon brought an army to fight Midian which God whittled to 300 men to fight. Gideon and his men – along with help from others of the Children of Israel – forced the Midianites and their allies to retreat.

As Gideon and his army pursued the Midianites and their allies they asked for provisions at Sukkot and Penuel but the people denied them provisions. For this denial, Gideon took revenge upon the men of these cities after he killed his enemies. After Gideon died, the Children of Israel again strayed from God's commands.

Abimelech, Gideon's son, went to Shechem and led a group of men back to his home and murdered his brothers – except Jotham who managed to escape. The inhabitants of Shechem made Abimelech king and Jotham chastised and cursed them before he fled. Through the intervention of God, the people of Shechem rebelled against Abimelech. After his recapture of Shechem Abimelech then went on to capture Thebez. In the tower of Thebez a woman – using a millstone – injured Abimelech who died at the hands of his weapon-bearer.

Tola judged Israel after the death of Abimelech for 23 years. After Tola's death, Jair became judge for 22 years. The Children of Israel began worshipping idols once again and as punishment God delivered them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites for 18 years. The Children of Israel cried out to God and begged for forgiveness. They removed all foreign gods from among themselves and worshipped God.

The Ammonites went to war against Israel and Jephthah was asked lead the Israelites in battle against the Ammonites. Jephthah made an agreement with God that if God would deliver the Ammonites into his hand the first thing that comes out of Jephthah's house would be delivered unto God as a sacrifice. God agrees and gives the Ammonites to Jephthah. Upon returning home, Jephthah's daughter comes to greet him and he grieves for he is duty-bound to offer her as a sacrifice.

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The people of Ephraim confronted Jephthah asking why he did not ask them to fight against the Ammonites. Jephthah argued that he did ask for assistance from the people of Ephraim but they ignored his plea so they went to war and the children of Ephraim were defeated. Ibzan was the next judge over Israel for seven years. Elon then judged Israel for ten years and Abdon then judged Israel for eight years.

The Children of Israel again did what displeased God and He delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. An angel came to the wife of Manoah and told her that she would conceive and bare a son who was to be a Nazirite from birth who would deliver Israel from the Philistines. Manoah's wife gave birth to a son whom was named Samson.

Samson convinced his mother and father to permit him to take a wife from the Philistines even though they wished him to take a wife from the Children of Israel. Samson asked a riddle of those in attendance at his wedding feast and offered a gift to those who could figure it out. Samson's wife eventually learned the answer and told the people what the answer was to the riddle which enraged Samson because they interrogated his wife. Samson's wife was then given to a companion of his by her own father.

Samson wanted to return to his wife but his father-in-law stated that she was given to another. Samson became enraged and burnt down the crops of the Philistines. As a result the Philistines burnt Samson's wife and her father with fire. Samson then slaughtered a multitude of Philistine soldiers. The men of Judah bound Samson to offer him to the Philistines but Samson was able to break those bonds with God's help.

Samson met Delilah who attempted to find out the source of Samson's great strength. Three times Delilah and her conspirators attempted to bind him but each time they discovered they had been deceived. At last, Samson told Delilah that his strength lay in the fact that a razor had never touched his head. Delilah and her conspirators shaved Samson's head and his strength immediately left him. Samson was then blinded and used to work the grind in the prison house but his hair grew. The Philistines brought Samson out to their temple during a celebration to their god Dagon where he was placed between two pillars. Samson called out to God for one last burst of strength. God heard his plea and Samson used the two pillars to bring down the temple – killing himself and the Philistines.

### **Appendices (Chapters 17-21)**

Micah had a house of idolatry in the land of Judah. A Levite came to Bethlehem where Micah took him in and the Levite became a priest in the house of idolatry.

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The Children of Dan were seeking an inheritance of land and sent out five spies to search out the land. These spies came upon the house of Micah and asked the Levite priest if they would have success and he affirmed that they would be successful. The Children of Dan found land and settled as an inheritance for themselves. The spies returned to the house of Micah and took the idol, ephod, and teraphim and the Levite went with them to be a priest unto the Children of Dan. The Children of Dan established the city of Dan and continued to practice idolatry until the time of the exile.

A Levite took a concubine from Bethlehem as a wife but she left him and returned to her father's house. The Levite pursued her and was persuaded by his father-in-law to remain at his home for five days. At the end of the fifth day the Levite left and the Levite, his wife, and his servant made it to Gibeah where an old man found them and invited them to lodge at his home. The men of the city surrounded the home and demanded that the Levite be brought out so they may have their way with him but instead the Levite threw his wife to the crowd who raped and abused her throughout the night. In the morning, the Levite found his wife dead at the door of the home. He placed her on his donkey and took her home where he dismembered her into twelve pieces which were sent out to all the borders of Israel with the plea of indignation over her plight.

400,000 footmen from all the tribes of Israel appeared before the Levite and asked him to explain what had occurred. The Levite told his story and the tribes demanded that the Children of Benjamin turn over the wicked men from Gibeah so they may be put to death. The Children of Benjamin refused to turn over the men and prepared to go to war. The army of the Israelites destroyed the Children of Benjamin.

The Israelites mourned the cutting off of the Children of Benjamin. They swore not to permit their daughters to marry the men of Benjamin but they also lamented over the fact that if this was carried out the tribe of Benjamin would cease to exist. The Israelites decided that since those from Jabesh-gilead had not partaken in the war, all would be destroyed. There were found 400 virgins at Jabesh-gilead who were given to the Children of Benjamin as a peace offering and to supply wives to the men. There was no king in Israel during this time and every man did what was right in his eyes.